

ELLORA PAINTINGS

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P. V. RANADE

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DR. P. V. RANADE

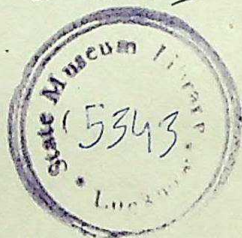


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AURANGABAD

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*March 17, 1980
4, University Campus,
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P.V. RANADE

*To The
Unknown
Artists of Ellora*

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Preview

WORLD fame of Ellora rests on the shoulders of its rock-cut sculptures. When measured in global scales, Ellora turns out to be biggest this, longest that and many a superlative thing in the history of world art. This estimate of Ellora is now a part of contemporary aesthetic sensibility. Yet it may surprise many if they were told that Ellora was once as rich as Ajanta in mural art. Most of the walls and ceilings of the rock-cut caves of Ellora were once decorated with the paintings that were as beautiful and splendid as Ajanta paintings. With those paintings Ellora was another Ajanta. Like Ajanta caves, Ellora caves were brightly coloured where paintings and sculptures were alternated and combined on a level of equal visual importance. Over the centuries much of the wealth of Ellora paintings was lost. This loss has robbed Ellora of its rightful place in the history of Indian painting. Yet the surviving murals contain a wealth of artistic creation that still astounds and surprises us with its variety of linear rhythm and coloured impressions. Fantastically rich world of Ellora paintings has not received its due at the hands of art historians. Not that

Ellora murals have not been commented upon in the texts of Indian art history. Very suggestive comments have been made by art historians about some of the panels of Ellora painting. But so far no separate and independent monograph on the Ellora paintings has appeared. The presentation that follows in the ensuing pages makes an attempt to cultivate the interest of the contemporary readers in the study of this neglected art treasure. The monograph that is being presented here is a preliminary study and as such it does not claim to be an exhaustive work on Ellora paintings.

Ellora, situated as it was on the land and sea-bound Indian trade routes of ancient times, turned out to be a focus of all cultural influences coming from the north and flowing back from the south. Ellora therefore became the prism through which the early medieval Indian art traditions refracted in all directions. Ellora has its ancestors, fraternities and descendants spread all over the Indian continent. Ellora sculptures and paintings hence represent the microcosm of early medieval art of India.

One's first inclination is to treat Ellora's paintings as inferior to Ajanta. The contrast between the two schools in the field of sensibility and technical accomplishment is obvious. But on closer observation one finds that Ellora may not retain all the achievements of Ajanta and yet it grows beyond it. Ellora artists are anonymous, but there are certain paintings at Ellora that have distinct marks of powerful minds who created those pieces. Grace, clarity and brilliance of certain paintings lift them from anonymity to permanent remembrance. The present monograph is an exercise to draw the attention of contemporary readers to these unknown artists of Ellora who deserve a better deal at the hands of art historians than the one they have received so far.

The presentation is not loaded with references and annotations, yet no part of it has been structured without a close and mindful consideration of the authoritative scholarship relating to the study. Select bibliography is attached at the end of the monograph. The present work does not try to break any new ground in the matter of investigating methodology of Indian art history, yet it does make some observations that call for new angles of approach to the reconstruction of Ellora's art history. The book proposes to analyse and interpret what it illustrates through beautiful colour plates.

It is difficult to recapture the freshness of Ellora's colours. My artist friend Prof. Shaikh Ramzan has attempted as faithful a reproduction of these paintings as possible. Colour plates were executed after consulting the earlier reported reproductions. A field survey of the entire Ellora cave complex made a surprising disclosure that except the caves numbering 3, 7, 28 and 31 all the Ellora caves were once profusely covered with paintings. Traces of the plaster and painted fragments are found on walls, ceilings, architraves, pillars and door-frames of most of the caves. Environmental elements and human brutalities have injured most of the paintings at Ellora. Whatever is left behind on the rock surfaces still gives an inkling into the once rich world of coloured rhythms of Ellora. There are certain fragments of well preserved painting which still glow with hue. The notable among them are in Kailasa, Ganesh, Indra Sabha and Jagannath Sabha Caves. The present work contains only a selection of some of the best preserved panels of Ellora paintings. There are hundreds of other panels which call for rescue, restoration and illustration.

The colour composition of the paintings of Ellora reflect various shades and tones that vary from hour to hour and

from season to season. Prof. Shaikh Ramzan has taken into account these vagaries of colour flexions and has tried to recapture the coloured rhymes of Ellora artists as faithfully as possible.

Grandiloquence of Ellora sculptures overshadows the Ellora paintings. One feels sorry that so small a quantum of paintings now remains at Ellora. These surviving fragments however make us aware of the enchanting picture galleries that adorned the walls and ceilings of Ellora caves.

Art And Vision of Ellora

A 13TH century Jain inscription names the hillside in the bosom of which nestle the world famous Ellora caves as Charanadri. This hillside is an extension of Sahyadri mountain into the heart of Deccan plateau. The sloping edges and steepy flanks of this Charanadri range in the Aurangabad district shelter the rock-cut monuments of Ellora. Ellora is about 25 kilometres from Aurangabad and 100 kilometres from Ajanta.

Undulating mountain spurs that mark the skyline of Deccan plateau shelter a chain of rock-cut monuments. Among these rock-cut monuments of the Deccan Ajanta, Elephanta and Ellora are the world famous ones.

A wide flung festoon of terraces and valleys, flat roofs and steep flanks characterise the topography of the Deccan plateau. The Deccan trap rock is ideally suited for the rock-cut architecture. The terraces, valleys and summits of the Deccan plateau consist of extensive horizontal flows of the trap. The soft portions of the trap beds wither and exfoliate

leaving suitable fresh rock in the bosom of the hills that rock-cutters could use. This favourable feature of the undulating spurs of the Sahyadri was one of the factors that led to record the heaviest rock-cut activity in Maharashtra.

Slow winding rocky slopes of Khultabad ghat move through the sprinkling of shrubs and wild plants till they reach foothills. When one gets down from the Khultabad ghat, one starts getting the most spectacular view of Ellora caves—curious heaps of cliffs and hill tops intervene between the everwidening sky dome and the green grassy foothills that skirt the Ela streamlet. Rock-cut monuments are seen spread over this crescent-shaped hill. In rainy season a number of small waterfalls that empty their torrents into deep pools cast a sprinkling archade over the caves.

Tourist excursions to art centres are often like cock-tail parties where men meet all types of men without knowing them intimately. Ellora caves shelter thousands of aesthetically important pieces. It is difficult to establish a stable rapport with all the objects that one encounters at Ellora. As one moves from site to site, one gets acquaintance with the monument depending on the sensibility of the visitor. The spell of Ellora's magic however leaves no one unmoved and unstirred. Ellora gets much sun throughout the year and some showers in the rainy days. In winter Ellora draws large picnic crowds. These cock-tail picnic crowds propose to see and admire Ellora in one day. Over centuries generations of artists and stone-cutters worked in the rocks and hollowed shrines and chambers dedicated to Buddha, Shiva and Tirthankar. Centuries of labour and art have made Ellora a subterranean township.

Ellora had been a major well-known centre of pilgrimage from the remote times. An early ninth century Rashtrakuta

copper-plate describing the Elapur situated Shiva Shrine Kailasanatha, suggested that even the gods were amazed to watch this wonder.

Ellora is the anglicized version of the Prakrit Elura that had undergone a mutation to Verula in Marathi, the local language. The Prakrit Elura was transformed into Sankrit Elapur. The earliest recorded reference to Ellora-Elapur is found in the copper-plate inscription of the Rashtrakuta prince Dantidurga which is dated saka samvata 663 (741 A.D.). The inscription mentions the grant of a village to certain Brahmins. The grant was made by Dantidurga at Elapur after taking bath at the Guheshvara Tirtha. The Elapur of this inscription is Ellora and the Guheshwar Tirtha is obviously the large deep pool that collects water from a picturesque waterfall near Dhumar cave at Ellora.

Unlike Ajanta, Ellora was never lost and therefore question of its rediscovery did not arise. Located on an ancient trade route that connected Paithan and Devagiri with the other eminent Indian towns and cities Ellora has always attracted attention of writers and travellers of ancient and medieval times.

The first notable comment on Ellora architecture is contained in an early ninth century copper-plate the text of which was written by a Sanskrit panegyrist of a Rashtrakuta prince. The Sanskrit text of this copper-plate pays homage to the architect who fashioned a Shivalaya out of a rocky hill. A number of Arab and European travellers and globe-trotters have also left their impressions of Ellora caves. Earliest non-Indian mention of Ellora caves was made by the tenth century Arab geographer Al-Masudi who described the Ellora rock-cut shrines as the most magnificent temple complex of India

A sixteenth century Muslim historian Farishta takes notice of these caves. Tajkira-ul-Salatin-i-Dakan refers to the visit of Hasan Gangoo Bahamani to Ellora. The Bahamani ruler was so much fascinated by the artistic magnificence of Ellora that he camped for a week at this site. The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was so much impressed by Ellora that he used to bring his daughters and daughters-in-law along with him during his frequent visits to Ellora caves. It is remarkable that Aurangzeb did not hide his admiration for these non-Muslim monuments.

Chakradhara, the medieval saint patron of the Mahanubhava sect, admired the awe-inspiring Manakeshwar cave i.e., Kailasanatha shrine in the following words: "Ha avagha dongaru pokalu ase konhi ethiche righne nighne jane na." [This entire hill seems to be hollow. No one knows how to enter it and come out of it.]

'Verula Shivalayamahatmya', an eighteenth century manuscript scribed by one Yajneshvaratmaj Purushottam, gives an interesting version about the excavation of the Kailasanatha shrine of Ellora. According to this version, a king named Elaraja caused Kailasanatha to be carved in order to fulfil the vow of his wife who had undertaken a fast till she saw a carved shrine of Kailasanatha. Kokas, a sculptor from Paithan was invited by the Elaraja for undertaking the excavation. Kokas accepted the invitation and came to Elapur along with his 7000 artisans. Kokas gave an estimate to the king that the entire work could be done in 16 months if all the 7000 artisans that he had brought were employed for the job. The king could not afford such a long time as his wife's life was at stake on account of the fast she was keeping. The sculptor fully appreciated Elaraja's predicament. He, therefore, found a way out of the situation. The queen had taken a vow that she would not take the food

until she saw the kalasa—the pinnacle—of Kailasa shrine. The Paithani artist therefore carved the kalasa part of the shrine within seven days and saved queen's life by giving her the satisfaction of fulfilment of her vow. This he could do because he was executing a design of a structural temple in rock-cut method which allowed the architects to carve from top to bottom. Verula Shivalayamahatmya also describes the methodology adopted for excavating the Kailasa shrine in a Marathi couplet:

Adhi Kalasa maga paya

Upharati mandili charya.

(First the top was carved and then the foundation was cut. In this topsy-turvy manner the design was executed).

The eighteenth century papers of the Maheshvara darbar tell us the story of the last layers of painting that were added to the outer walls of the Kailasa shrine under the instructions of Ahilyabai Holkar.

Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain Viharas, Chaityas and temples carved out of the living rock at Ellora enshrine the wisdom, philosophy, mythology and the artistic ethos of early medieval India. Tremendous proportions of the carved pillared halls, long and awe-inspiring colonnaded monasteries, mysterious play of light and shadow on the rock-cut shapes, the graceful fluidity of the flying gandharvas and apsaras, majestic images of Buddha, Jain and Brahmanical gods, the gigantic rock-cut miracle of the Kailasanatha shrine and many other impressive features of this cave complex have made Ellora a wonderland of early medieval Indian art.

The excavation work commenced at Ellora some time in the sixth century A.D. and over several centuries creative incitement of early medieval artists continued to playfully

chisel the graceful shapes and figures out of the unsounded depth of the Ellora rocks. Over centuries instinctual and cultivated urges of the Indian artists had poured into the rocky world of monumental fantasy. The last cave on the top of the shoulder of Ellora hill was excavated as late as early fourteenth century. Rest of the fifty major and minor caves of Ellora were cut sometime between sixth and twelfth century.

The well-known art of Ellora is an architectonic carving of structural models and animated figures. At Ellora to move from one monument to another is to find chambers, pavilions, towers and architraves enclosing a wealth of carved miracles. Gods and goddesses, demons, gandharvas and apsaras, musicians and dancers, yakshas and kinnaras, yogis and warriors, lions and elephants, trees and mountains, oceans and rivers, serpents and crocodiles, giants and dwarfs creepers and flowers, in their simple and fantastic manifestation decorate the walls, roofs and doors of the rock-cut pavilions. The rocky monumentality of the shapes confront us with charming ease and magical touch. A visit to Ellora is a charmed journey into a fairyland. One has to adjust oneself when one visits a fairyland. Ellora houses many dream sequences of such a fairyland. We cannot go straight into the meaning of the dream sequences but stumble and circle round and try to hold them. A visit to Ellora enables one to enter the dreamland of Indian devotional ethos. The labyrinths of ancient Indian cultural heritage with their sectarian intricacies and orthodoxies have received permanent habitation in the wonderland of Ellora.

In between the first and the last groups of excavations at Ellora are found all types, styles and levels of artmanship. There are some clumsy affairs of architectonic exercises in the midst of world famous miracles of art at Ellora. These caverns

were cut to make halls, chambers, pavilions, shrines and pendals. In these hollowed parts of the hewn out structures, gateways, doorframes, pillars, roofs and towers are utilized more for decorative purposes than for functional ones. Entire rock-cut architecture at Ellora is therefore a sculpture on magnificent level

Ellora presents us with some of the boldest geotechnique compositions in world sculpture. Ellora sculptors were imitated and even improved upon by the later medieval Indian artists. Ellora artists however remain unrivalled in their capacity to make use of unsounded depth of the rocks and the nebulous world of light and shade for powerful and effective sculptural representations. Modulation of light and shade and the vibrating atmosphere of rock-cut shelters render magic touch to the sculptures of Ellora. While moving in the Ellora caves we have a feeling of seeing colossal tableaux of sculptures in the rock-cut shelters where light and shadow chase each other. Tied to the rocks these sculptures glow with lively movements. World sculpture can show few instances of such an artistic creativity. Such an artistic escarpment and projection of volcanic rock was being tried and experimented over a period of thousand years at such far and near places as Dhauli, Bhaja, Karle, Ajanta, Elephanta and Badami. A dramatic consummation of this tradition was achieved at Ellora.

Every cave at Ellora has its own focal point. In certain caves the stately radiant pillars with their massive monumentality and florid beauty impart an impression of a solid living faith of bygone days. In some caves the sculpture galleries draw our main attention. In more than one sense Ellora caves are the finest sculpture galleries of early medieval Indian art. In a shrine like Kailasa one is dumbfounded to witness the stupendous feat of rock-cut architecture and

sculpture. In Indra Sabha the chief attraction is equally shared by the paintings, sculpture and architecture.

In most of the caves, however, the focal points are centred round the figures of divinities—Buddha, Shiva and Tirthankar. Music, dancing and erotic play of all the carved and painted creatures turn to the central figures of divinity. Devas and devatas, apsaras and gandharvas, vidyadharas and kinnaras, dwarfs, makaras, vyalas, elephants and bulls, whether they are in the main hall or in the side chambers, in porches, in balconies, in galleries, whether they are standing or flying, the entire world of these artistically drawn devotees are found switching their attention to the central figure of divinity in the main shrine—either Buddha, Shiva or Tirthankar.

From cave to cave, from pillar to pillar, and from image to image, it **needs** a long and leisurely attention to appreciate the creative skill and significance of each piece of art. Variety of reasons will draw a visitor to a particular cave and compel him to stay longer than intended. In some caves doorways and window-frames will attract the attention of the visitor. The nagas and naginis, the river goddesses and tree goddesses, birds and flowers, loving couples and fanciful animals playfully cluster around these doorways and window-frames. The exuberance and beauty of the entablature of these shrine doorways in many caves articulate the poetry of the architectonic rhythm and melody. The great paired attendants flanking the doorways display energy, fury, love and fear and all possible shades of passions.

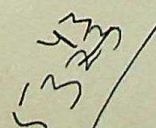
The pillars in these caves really don't support the ceilings. They however create an impression of structural stability within the rock-cut shrines. Apart from fulfilling this psychological function they are used for holding medallions that

are replete with foliate decorations, auspicious figures and erotic play. Scenes of discreet erotic play, artistically drawn celestial and earthly creatures and florid forms of anthropomorphic figures, birds and animals make these medallions on the pillars immensely attractive. The female figures from the brackets, dwarfs who play flutes and drums and carry heavy loads, also make these pillars attractive.

It needs patience, devotion and suspense of disbelief to rehear and recall the tones of chanting music that was once played at Ellora. It needs some imagination to inhale the fragrance of the incense that once must have filled the air of Ellora caves.

Proliferation of creeds and cults over the entire Indian sub-continent was a marked feature of Indian cultural history. In early medieval times Ellora functioned as a prism of this cultural proliferation. Geo-political location of Ellora has rendered it a unique position in the Indian cultural dynamics. The part of the Deccan in which Ellora is located represents a terrain of cultural synthesis that involved integration of Northern Indian stylistics with South Indian cultural patterns. Ellora is the creation of this early medieval cultural dynamics. Movements of institutions and ideas, of art motifs and designs affected Ellora in consonance with its geo-politics. From 6th century A.D. to 12th century A.D. Ellora functioned as a prism through which continental, regional and local cultural trends refracted in all directions. This period was a time of Buddhist decline, Shaivite resurgence and Jain revival in the Deccan. Ellora caves articulate this aspect of Indian historical sociology of early medieval times.

Origins of Ellora art are scattered all over the Indian continent. It will be a folly to trace the heritage of Ellora art



to any one particular school or centre. Ellora's origins are inextricably entangled with the artistic impulses that were throbbing with life in various regions of India. The contemporary and earlier cultural trends active elsewhere gave their fluctuating shades to the broad stream of artistic expression at Ellora. The sensibility of the Ellora artists could not escape the influence of philosophy, theology and aesthetic ethos of their times. Ellora's style of composition, its diction, its texture, were a matter of taste and fashion prevailing in its environs.

Artistic expression of Ellora—sculpture, architecture and painting—does not represent a unilinear development of any particular style and diction. Six or seven centuries of art activity of Ellora take in their strides the achievements and accomplishments of various regional styles and schools that had grown over the entire continent. Ellora has its ancestors, it has its fraternities, proteges and descendants. Ellora's affinities are spread over the entire Indian continent.

Ellora attracted the attention of all the three major religious orders of early medieval times—Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain. These rock-cut monasteries were not only retreats for the monks but they served as inns and rest-houses for merchants and princes. Merchants, bankers, artisans, affluent agriculturists, state officials and feudal warlords gave patronage to these monasteries which lie on the trade routes. The monasteries offered protection and security to the flow of trade. The monasteries were also important customers for the caravans. Monasteries needed cloth, perfumes and lamps. These caves thus functioned as abbeys which were important stages on the long distance trade routes, as resting places for the Sarthavahas—Caravaneers—as well as supply house and banking posts. Most of these caves were located near the mountain passes guarded by the forts which protected the

kingdom and travellers and collected the tolls from the Caravans. The kingly obligations, spiritual needs and trade facilities thus converged at the sites of monasteries.

Invariably the cave monasteries of Buddhists, Shaivites and Jains were located in the vicinity of ancient cult sites. Reference has already been made to the visit of the Rashtrakuta prince to Guheshvar Tirtha at Elapur i.e., Ellora in the eighth century. Ghrishneshvara temple at Ellora is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas which attract Shaivite visitors from all over the country. Guheshvar Tirtha mentioned in the eighth century inscription can safely be connected with the Ghrishneshvara Jyotirlinga temple at Ellora.

The political skydome under which the Ellora cave monasteries functioned during their hey days was overcast with feuds among the various sections of feudal aristocracy. In absence of a central political authority in the country, region was set against region. Perpetual wars of conquests undertaken by the regional warlords often destroyed the economic prosperity and human lives. In the dynastical wars, villages, cattle, grains, women and men suffered. Cities were sacked and granaries burnt. In this background of ceaseless warfare, religious monasteries seem to have functioned as islands of peace and quietude. Monasteries had the tranquility and safety which royal palaces lacked. In a war torn world of feudal tyranny, religion was the sigh and solace of every helpless creature. Mahayogi trinity of Buddha Shiva and Tirthankara offered a soul to the soulless world, a heart to a heartless world.

The scholarly debates over the dynastical affinities of these cave monuments have often missed this perspective. Great worthies are still debating whether Dhumar-Rameshvar caves of Ellora were due to patronage of Chalukyas or

Kalachuris. Perhaps the Shaivite mahantas of Ellora monasteries might have pocketed grants from both the royal houses. Who knows, the arch-priest of Guheshvara Tirtha might have performed puja and rudrabhisheka for the good of both warring houses!

Over centuries feudal aristocracy and merchant princes had been patronising these monasteries. Their patronage sprang from many motives. These monasteries exercised various functions that helped the common people. Religions are made of that stuff on which dreams are made. Human miseries are partly and illusorily relieved by dreams. In medieval times when feudal aristocracy and merchant princes had cornered all the wealth and beautiful women, when all the luxuries of life were the privileged possessions of the rich, common ploughman had to cultivate the fields and also fight the endless wars of the medieval warlords, religion provided a great solace to the common man. Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism in early medieval times were not very different from each other in matters of social system. They together taught the common masses to renounce the vanities of this world and seek salvation from this or that deity by devotion and austere life. Religion saved the common masses from allurements of possession and wealth, and spared the feudal aristocrats to enjoy the luxuries of life. The monasteries also functioned as transmission houses for passing on the traditional skills and cultural values to the younger generations. Poets and scholars, artists and artisans worked for monasteries as well as for royal palaces. Most of the rock chambers and shrines of the Shramans and Brahmans at Ellora were therefore modelled after royal palaces of the rajas and samantas.

Though the patronage of wealthy merchants, guilds and royal houses made these excavations of Ellora possible, the

main impressive element that remains hovering in the background of Ellora is the religious ethos of the people. The large paraphernalia of servants and attendants which these cave monasteries must have required for the comfortable living of the monks, would not have been possible without the patronage of the rich people and willing submission of the masses. Whether Indian culture is all spiritualism and otherworldliness is a point that can be debated endlessly. What is obvious in Indian history pertains to endless use of religion for secular purposes. Religion provided the cushion that could absorb the shocks and tensions of a war-torn society. Though individual rulers had their own sectarian leanings and likings, by and large the medieval Indian rulers showed remarkable spirit of religious tolerance. The great religious monasteries also displayed equal enthusiasm for receiving patronage from all sorts of rulers, just or unjust, cruel and kind. The spirit of accommodation was mutually beneficial.

While the patronage of royal houses and merchant princes made the rock-cut monasteries possible the actual physical labour involved in excavation of these caves must have been put by a section of humanity called karmakara-karu--shilpi-rangavatari and such other artisans of early medieval India who were looked down by the Brahmin-Ksatriya elites. One of the dramatic ironies of India's age-old culture relates to the position karu-shilpi held in the estimate of classical text-writers. While Bharata and Vatsyayana sang the glory of the arts of drama, dancing and painting, the smriti writers excluded the sculptors, dancers, architects, painters, players, musicians and artisans from any honourable position in Hindu social hierarchy. The artists in India were bracketed together with women and shudras as of low and ignoble status. Along with women and shudras, artists were the wretched of the earth. These very karmakaras, rangavataris,

shilpis have dropped fluorescent curves on the Ellora rocks. Strokes and beats of their chisels have poured rhythm and rhyme into the shapely figures at Ellora. Strokes of their chisels, thrusts of their hammers and touches of their brushes have tamed the rocks of Ellora. Lively flora of shapely figures that has blossomed on the walls and ceilings of Ellora is due to them.

It will be better if we separate Indian art and its contemporary legend. To most of the readers Indian art is nothing but plastically rendered Indian spiritualism. On closer scrutiny, however Indian spiritualism itself is a byproduct of Indian material milieu.

At Ellora Buddhism, Brahmanism and Jainism live face to face. Their myths and symbols and heroes are different and yet they have much in common. The Yogi and the Devi are equally close to heart of Buddhists, Brahmins and Jains. The celestial world of apsaras, gandharvas, yaksas, kinnaras and vidyadharas is equally shared by Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain Ellora. What is shared absolutely and enthusiastically is the sport of love. At Ellora esoteric mysteries of the festival of love co-mingle with the longings for moksha, nirvana and mukti. Ellora art has been enriched by a wealth of erotic themes. The whole seraglio of Indra's paradise has come down to Ellora. Celestial singers and dancers blessed with youth and beauty are invariably drawn in erotic shade. Though heavenly in origin they possess eloquence of earthly charms. The elongated legs, the enlarged hips, the slender waist and the breasts that don't droop render the feminine divinities with a charm that is certainly earthly.

The art of Ellora whether Buddhist, Brahmanical or Jain, was shaping under a common canopy of tantric spell. The artists who did the job of cutting and painting the rocks were

invariably the followers of various Tantric cults that proliferated all over India in this period. The Tantra hovers over the entire early medieval Indian art. What these pleasure loving sensuous figures with their wealth of hairdress, ornaments, costumes meant to the priests and monks who lived in these rock-cut chambers is a question that baffles everyone who sees them.

The erotic couples, swinging across the firmament, do have an affinity with the romantic cycles of ancient Indian tales. The repertoire of the contemporary feudal princely harems and courtesans, with which the Tantric artists were not unfamiliar, largely account for these erotic scenes at Ellora.

Though the vision of Ellora art is divine, the art itself is this worldly. The fundamental tone of this art, its realism, its liveliness spring from motives that are absolutely this worldly. Its spiritualism is mythological, its realism is human.

An Overview of Ellora

WHAT follows here is a short-hand account and a rapid survey of all the caves of Ellora. This short account proposes to give an overview of the architecture and sculpture of Ellora caves as well as place the results of a spot survey that the author conducted to trace the coloured drawings on the walls and ceilings of these caves. The spot survey reveals a surprising finding that except a few caves, most of the rock-cut chambers of Ellora were once covered with mural paintings.

Caves 1 to 13 are Buddhist monasteries and shrines, 14 to 29 are Brahmanical excavations and 30 to 34 are Jain monasteries and shrines. On the extreme shoulder of the hill a rock-shelter enshrines a large image of Tirthankar. On the mid-top of the hill there is a small group of caves called Ganesa lene.

BUDDHIST CAVES

Cave I: This is the earliest Buddhist monastery at Ellora.

It is a plain undecorated rectangular vihara with eight cells cut in the rear. There are traces of plaster on the back wall, ceiling and on the door-frames, walls and ceilings of the cells.

Cave II: In this Buddhist shrine, which seems to have been the main sanctuary of the Buddhist group of caves, our attention is drawn by the beautifully carved massive pillars of the 'vase and foliage' type that support the central hall. Our attraction is equally drawn by the galleries of Buddha images. Jombhal in the veranda, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani as guardian figures at the entrance, images of seated Buddha flanked by Bodhisatvas, the figure of Tara and the huge image of Buddha in the central shrine dominate the sculptured elements of this cave. Traces of plaster are seen all over the cave.

Cave III: This is a vihara with a central hall, supported by twelve pillars of the 'vase and foliage' type. Besides the seated Buddha flanked by Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani, a small representation of the miracles of Avalokiteshvara, cut on the backwall of the veranda draw our attention. There are no clear traces of plaster or painting.

Cave IV: This is a two-storeyed excavation whose first floor is much ruined on account of the fall of rock. A large carving of Tara and the monumental image of Buddha draw our attention. Faint traces of plaster are seen on the back wall.

Cave V: This is one of the most interesting caves of Ellora. It is a large vihara with a long rectangular tunnel shape mandapa. Two parallel rows of stone-cut low benches that might have served as seats for the assembled Buddhist Bhikkus of bygone days draw our instant attention. A charming love scene on the right hand palaster at the entrance, and the

large figure of Buddha in the central shrine also catch our attention. This cave was once profusely painted and decorated. Now only traces of plaster and paints are seen on ceiling, architraves and side walls.

Cave VI: This Buddhist vihara is quite an elaborate rock-cut structure with a central hall, two side halls, an ante-chamber and shrine cut in the back wall. One surviving bracket figure that decorates one of the front pillars, shows a gracefully cut figure of a lovely celestial damsel admiring her own beauty in a mirror. Elegantly carved pillars with vase and foliage design, large image of Mahamayuri standing under a makara torana, by the side of peacock with its tail spread, image of Tara holding a long stalked lotus, imposing figure of Buddha guarded by huge bodhisatvas, beautiful mouldings on the doorway and the overhanging entablature of the central shrine that contains a longspread panel of enmeshed towers and roofs, hold our attention. Traces of plaster are seen all over the cave.

Cave VII: is an unfinished Buddhist monastery. There are no traces of plaster or colour.

Cave VIII: This is an unusually designed Buddhist chamber which combines a chaitya and vihara. A number of cells are cut into the side walls. Image of Buddha in dharmachakramudra, figures of Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya, Tara, Mahamayuri, and kneeling worshippers catch our attention. The imposing Panchika and Hariti with a child in our lap are cut on the outside wall of the cave. Traces of plaster are seen on the doorframes of the side cells, architrave, ceiling and walls of the side chamber.

Cave IX: The ornamental facade of this cave attracts the visitor from even a long distance. It is a crowded affair with

rows of arched towers, and Buddhist iconography. The panel which shows Tara delivering her devotees from six dangers is an unusual feature here. Amorous couples carved in the compartments of the octagonal band of the pillars hold us for some time. Traces of paintings and decorative designs are seen all over the cave.

Cave X: Popularly known as Visvakarma cave, this cave is the only Chaitya at Ellora and represents the final phase of the development of rock-cut chaitya in Western India. Unlike Ajanta Chaityas which open directly into the rock face, Visvakarma has a courtyard, an exterior gallery and a balcony decorated with galaxy of sculptures. The facade arch has developed here into an imposing trefoil arcade flanked by flying gandharvas and apsaras. This trefoil arcade serves as a sunwindow through which an approach is made into interior balcony perhaps meant for accommodating a musical orchestra. From this balcony one can have a thrilling view of the Chaitya interior. The apsidal hall with long rows of pillars supporting a ribbed vaulted roof, contain beautiful, carved panels and friezes of loving couples and preaching Buddha. On the stupa itself a huge image of Buddha is carved under an arch formed by Bodhi tree and figures. The pillars in the apsidal hall are vase and toliage shape. This cave is one of the finest of Buddhist excavations. Traces of coloured plaster are found all over the cave.

Cave XI: This cave, locally known as Do Thal, is actually a three storeyed Buddhist monastery. Its ground floor was covered with debris until it was cleared. A number of Buddhist shrines are surrounded by the usual Vajrayana Buddhist iconographic paraphernalia. Large images of Buddha flanked by Bodhisatvas, Buddhist Shakti Tara, Jambhal and Sujata offering food to Buddha before his enlightenment, and many other Buddhist images of this cave are noteworthy.

Traces of coloured plaster and traces of painted figure are seen on the ceilings and walls on all the storeys of this cave. Thick layers of painted plaster still stick to the walls.

Cave XII: Locally known as Tin Thal, this cave was the biggest Buddhist monastery at Ellora. It has impressive and rich sculptures which depict the Buddhist folklore with usual iconographic features. The seven Manushi Buddhas, Buddhist goddess Tara, and Bodhisatva Maitreya are some of the most impressive figures in this cave. Its open spacious courtyard marks the impressive entrance to the cave. Widespread traces of profusely painted plaster and painted figures are seen all over the ceiling of the third storey of this cave. Faint figures of flying gandharvas and apsaras are also visible. Creeper decorated borders of the painted panels are still visible on the ceiling of the third storey. Traces of plaster are seen on the walls and ceilings of the two lower storeys also.

Cave XIII: This is a plain rectangular undecorated cave.

Cave XIV: Locally known as Ravana ki-khai it marks the beginning of the Brahmanical caves at Ellora. This rock-cut shrine has a large hall supported by sixteen pillars. The image in the central shrine is missing. A safe guess makes it a Devi mandir. The two panels of four-armed Durga and Mahisasuramardini on both corners at the opening of the cave strengthen this guess. The side walls of this cave contain some of the finest sculptural panels at Ellora. Vaisnavite panels adorn one side and the Shaivite panels adorn the other side. The Gajalakshmi, Varahavatara, Vishnu with Shri and Bhudevi, Andhakasura vadha, Nataraja-Shiva, Ravana shaking Kailasa are some of the themes of powerful sculptural expression in this cave. One of the back sides of this cave has a beautiful saptamatrika panel. Traces of plaster are visible all over the cave,

Cave XV: This cave called Dasavatar is a two-storeyed Shaivite structure. The courtyard houses a closed pavilion that must have functioned as a concert hall. This pavilion has an 8th century inscription that mentions the visit of the Rashtrakuta ruler Dantidurga to Ellora. The ground floor of this two-storeyed cave must have been used as resting place for the royal visitors. The upper storey has a large forty-eight pillar supported hall arranged in eight rows of six. In the wall is cut the central Shivalinga shrine. The flanking sides show one of the finest galleries of Indian sculpture depicting Shaivite and Vaishnavite themes. The panels that show cosmic dance of Shiva, Andhakasurantaka Shiva, and Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu are among the miracles of Indian plastic art. Both the storeys of this cave were once profusely painted. Traces of plaster and painted figures are visible on the ceiling of the upper storey. Ovals in rectangles, sunflowers are still visible. Lower storey was also painted. Traces are still visible.

Cave XVI: The "so-called" Kailasa cave is a miracle of Indian rock-cut architecture. Rashtrakuta king Krishna was the chief patron of this excavation.

The great Kailasa shrine is described in a Rashtrakuta copperplate grant of the eight century as "compelling the admiration of even the celestials, who pause on their heavenly course to gaze at the beauty of so magnificent a monument and wonder how anyone could create so extraordinary a structure."

This stupendous monolithic temple was hewn from the top downward out of a hill of solid rock. The entire edifice—the several pillared halls, the large court, the monolithic elephants, the two dhawaja stambhas, the pyramidal tower and the gopuras—was chiselled from one single rock. The main shrine

complex and the subsidiary cloistered Lankeshvara shrine, contain one of the greatest sculpture galleries of the world. Kailasa shrine of the Ellora remains to this date one of India's greatest art treasures. The entire Kailasa was once profusely painted and decorated on all sides. There are a number of layers of painting visible on the walls, ceilings and all corners of this monument.¹ The first layer of painting was executed in the eighth century and the last painted wash given in the eighteenth century. The entrance porch of Kailasa, the ceiling and door frames of the main hall, ceiling of the side porches have some of the finest paintings still visible in Kailasa. The enclosure wall of the main shrine has some painted panels with Tantrik tones executed in gerua colour in the eighteenth century. The ceiling of the Lankeshvar also exhibits some faint yet visible flying figures. The Nandi Mandapa of Lankeshvar has a big Shaivate painted panel.

Cave XVII: The cave is unfinished, yet there are some excellent carvings on the pillars and the walls. Images of Vishnu and Brahma, Mahisasuramardini and the four-armed Ganesha are interesting presentations. The shapely tree-goddesses that compose the brackets on the square based fluted pillars, and the attractive doorway of the shrine, though left in the unfinished state, are equally interesting. Traces of plaster are visible all over the cave.

Cave XVIII: This cave has four clumsy unfinished columns in front. The main shrine has a salunka. Traces of painted plaster are visible all over the cave.

Cave XIX: This much damaged cave is dedicated to Shivalinga. Traces of painted plaster are visible all over the cave.

Cave XX: This is a small shivalinga shrine. Traces of painted plaster are faintly visible on the ceiling.

Cave XXI: Rameshwara cave is one of the loveliest artistic creations at Ellora. Impressive Nandi pedestal dominates the Court. The beautiful figure of Ganga in the corner of the court, decorated porch balustrade, the shapely shalabhanjiaks in the pillar brackets, impressive narrative and the attractive features of the door-frame have rendered artistic majesty to this cave. Traces of plaster are visible on the corners of the ceiling and pillars.

Cave XXII: The Nilakantha cave has a ten pillar-supported square hall. The two pillars in the ante-chamber have splendid bracket figures of loving couples. There are also impressive sculptures of Ganesha, Kartikeya, Saptamatrikas and Virabhadra. This cave was once profusely painted. Traces are visible all over the cave.

Cave XXIII: This is an unfinished cave with a Shivalinga and a Trimurti. Faint traces of plaster are visible on the ceiling.

Cave XXIV: This is also an unfinished cave with five low cells. Traces of plaster are visible on ceiling and walls.

Cave XXV: This is a proposed ambitious yet unfinished structure. The most interesting sculpture in this cave is that of sun God on the ceiling of the vestibule. Surya's chariot is seen drawn by seven steeds and females on each side are shown shooting an arrow. This was perhaps a sun temple. Traces of plaster are visible on the ceiling, walls and pillars. The entire cave was once profusely painted.

Cave XXVI: The columns of this cave have affinity with those of Elephanta. This was also a Shaivite shrine. Traces of paintings and plaster are visible all over the cave.

Cave XXVII: This cave was excavated in a lovely setting—overlooking a large and deep pool fed by a cataract. Traces of painted plaster are visible on the ceiling of the veranda.

Cave XXVIII: This is a small cave with a couple of cells, a vestibule and shrine. The image of eight armed Devi of this cave is still worshipped by the village folk. The cave is just under the cliff from which a waterfall empties down into the deep pool. There are no traces of paintings or plaster, but soot deposits are seen in the ceiling.

Cave XXIX: Dumara Lena or Sitaki Nahani cave is one of the imposing rock-cut structures at Ellora. Echoes of Elephanta cave can be traced in its architectonic execution as well as in the imposing guardian figures of the central Siva shrine. The panels illustrate the Shaiva mythology with Siva as Nataraja, Lakulesha, Kalyanasundarmurti, Andhakasuran-taka and Kailasapati. This cave was also once richly painted. Outline figures of elephants and horses are observed over the fine sculptures of this cave. Traces of plaster are visible all over the cave.

GANESA LENA

There is a group of Brahmanical caves called Ganesha Lenee on the top ridge above the Dumar lena. In one of these caves there are a number of mural paintings.

JAIN CAVES

Cave XXX: Among the Jain groups of caves, cave 30 is popularly called Chhota Kailasa, a smaller edition of the great Kailasa cave. It is a free standing shrine carved out of

the rock. The carvings of Tirthankaras, Chakreshvari, dancing figures and the vestiges of paintings on the ceilings and the architectonic echoes of greater Kailasa make this rock-cut shrine, one of the most interesting monuments of Ellora. Traces of plaster are visible all over the monument.

Cave XXXI: is a four pillared hall with a central shrine cut in the rear wall. Carvings of Parsvanatha Dharanendra and Gomatesvara images are the chief interesting sculptural features of the cave. There are no traces of paintings.

Cave XXXII: is known as Indra Sabha. Images of Tirthankaras, Gomateshvara, Matanga, Ambika, dominate the main hall. Entire cave complex is covered with mural paintings.

Cave XXXIII is known as Jagannath Sabha and the cave 34 repeats the Jain iconography in sculpture as well as in painting.

The last of the Jain caves excavated in the early 14th century is located on the shoulder of the same hill, about half a kilometre away from this group. It has a colossal figure of Tirthankar.

In Praise of Bharatiya Rangayana

PAINTING has functioned as a vehicle of popular cultural movements from remotest of times. This is so because painting is the liveliest of the languages known to man. Human ideas and emotions nowhere so brightly come to life as in painting. Linear rhythm and sweeping brushwork make painting a festival of music and light. It is the light that clothes human vision with coloured strokes and put exciting life on the still surfaces of clay and rock. Variety of pigments—red, orange, scarlet, crimson, yellow, gold, green, blue, purple violet, pink, white and black—and their infinite combinations reflect filterate and interfere through the strokes and sweeps of the brush for projecting human passions and visions. Lively pigments when projected from the palette not only transform the luminosity of light into various tones and shades but renders a new life to human fortunes. Human hopes, fears and longings are lifted from the level of personal trifles to universal, valuables in all arts. In painting this is accomplished with a bright and soft touch. In painting visions and passions of men receive value and purity through a variety of tones and shades. As many passions so many shades and tones. Light

and deep, warm and cool, rich and dull and such other couplings of shades and tones are infused with variety of strokes of brush. How varied are their nuances! Some strokes are strong and some of them are shy. Some are bold, some are timid. One is smart, other one is shabby. That one is dull, and this one is brilliant. Some of them look plumpy and some appear lean. Some strokes strike aggressive, and some are lame. There are strokes and strokes—plain dubious, racy, halting, convincing and obstinate.

These varied strokes have left various impressions on the shifting epochs of man's artistic expression. Through the changing epochs of history, aesthetic and social texture of human creativity had been unfolding a theme of multiple variations and change. In midst of these mutations, certain elements of human situation however remained unaltered. Multi-colour flow of a rainbow arch continued to delight the human heart. Fluttering feathers of chirping birds never ceased to draw the attention of human eyes, the magic of light and shadow has always thrilled human mind; flames and flora of the forest have always fired man's imagination. The arrows of Madana have never missed their targets. These elements have remained the primary stimulants of human creativity all through the ages. Brush, lines, dots and curves did not shed any of their habits, yet the man himself got changed through the ages. Hunter and food gatherer became a cattle keeper and food-producer. From simplistic clan relations, man moved towards more complicated human relations. These changing perspectives of human reality are reflected in art as well. The drawings and engravings of the stone age are different from those of the metal age. The art of the primitive fraternities who enjoyed sky-bound freedom is different from the art of civilized men who are bound by the earthly ties of dominance and servitude.

Development of Indian art has broadly followed the track of socio-cultural mutations and changes. India's socio-cultural history has not traversed a simple, straight and logical sequence. A variety of twists and turns, leaps and setbacks mark India's socio-cultural history. A capsulised view of the entire process of social mutations in early historic India will give us a following picture. The cultural patterns that originated in the palaeolithic and chalcolithic settlements in pre-historic India flowed into subsequent epochs of social evolution—the two agrarian and urban revolutions in the Indus and Gange-tic basins and their proliferation over the entire subcontinent, and the emergence of caste-based feudal dominated closed village economy together constitute the main interest of the story of Indian development. It is a story that imparts a picture of endless variety of different tribes passing the hunting and food gathering phase into culture of food producers under the conditions of extremely variegated growth of social organisation. Process of combining the primitive with the advanced, local with the continental, and indigenous with the intruders was the marked feature of social dynamics in Indian history.

This parabolic spiral of socio-cultural development provided the track for the growth of artistic expression in India.

Indian art and aesthetics have developed the same way as elsewhere. Everywhere language came first; grammar followed it and later on language traced the tract laid down by the grammar. This is the dialectics of human rhetorics. Everywhere artists have created the power of symbolic expression and learned men have discussed it and wrote in Mulk Raj Anand's words 'how to do it texts'. Later the artists either followed or broke the rules and went on with their creative ventures.

Theoretical stance of ancient Indian artistic vision was

invariably idealistic but its grounding was always realistic. Indian theory of art is based on twin elements of visionary invocation and realistic perception. While theorists of Indian art held that the formal element of art represents a purely mental activity, they also equally stressed that with regard to representation sym-visibility and con-similarity are the very essential substance of the art of painting. Indian philosophers trusted the inwardly known model more than the empirical perception; Indian aesthetics laid more stress on the canons and rules of composition that presupposed elements of exactness and verifiability. In Indian aesthetic tradition creative faculty was always regarded as a process that involved the play of skill that were innate as well as acquired and taught.

Appreciation of Ellora painting is not possible without understanding the theory of ancient Indian painting. Vishnudharmottor Purana, Kamasutra, Natyashastra, Chitralakshna and several other ancient Indian treatises on art and poetics contain a rich treasure of theoretical material.

The concept of shadanga—six limbs—forms an important theoretic premise of ancient Indian poetics. **Rupabheda**—variety of forms, **pramana**—proportion, **bhava yojana**—infusion of emotions, **lavanyayojana**—creation of grace and charm, **sadrishyam**—portrayal of likeness, and **varnikabhanga**—colour mixing and brush work resulting in modelling are the six limbs of Indian painting.

Chitrasutra of Vishnudharmottar discusses the nature of modelling under three heads—**Tala**—face measure, **sthana**—poses and **ksaya vridhi**—method of foreshortening. It describes four styles of painting as **Satya**—realistic, **Vainic**—lyrical, **Nagara**—sophisticated and **Mishra**—mixed.

Upamitibhavana Prapancha Katha, a medieval text, praises

the virtues of a drawing that is delicately drawn in unoffending lines, bright colours and relief modelling. Vishnu Dharmottara, an earlier work had advised the painter to avoid the following defects—fault of dotty workmanship, loss of sense of modelling, exaggeration of facial features, and imbalance in figure drawing. Vishnu Dharmottara listed the good qualities of painting as follows:

The right stance, sound proportions grace, sym-visibility and con-similarity and foreshortening are the chief merits of good painting.

These ancient Indian texts enumerate the variety of artists and craftsmen—*shilpi*, *dindin*, *chitracharya*, *hastalekha*, *varnaka*—who used to do different jobs allotted to them. **Rekha-pradana**, drawing of sketch, **Chitrasutra pradana**—colouring—**vartana**—modelling, **Chitronmilana**—infusion of life into the picture, formed the nature of work assigned to different types of artists.

These texts also discuss kit of the ancient Indian painter—**Samudgaka**—box of brushes, **Varnika karanda**—colour box, **Tulika**—brush, **Shalaka**—stick, **Pata**—canvas, **Phalaka**—board, **Vajralepa**—the binding medium for colours. *Silpa-sutras* have enumerated twin principles of *bhanga* and *sutra* for modelling different types of images. Just as a musician blends the octave for creating a melody, the sculptor and painter model their images by following the system of proportions based on *tala* and *angula*—time measure and space measure. Modelling of a figure involves correlation of five *sutras* (axes) and four *bhangas* (deflexions). The *sutras* are related to the various parts of the body and *bhangas* are related to the curves of the body. Ancient Indian artist really never believed in the dichotomy of religious belief and worldly realities. In his hand ideas and values of physical and psycho-

logical realms were equally valid and interconnected. Sensuous naturalism was therefore a strong point of Indian art tradition despite the heavy weight of vedantic ideas that stressed the unreality of the material world.

The magic band of the sensuous naturalism united the craftsmen, artists, patrons and the devotees who together formed the social context and supra-personal identity of the concerned art. This wordly sensuous realism of the Indian artist was off-course tempered with the that-worldly idealistic vision. The magic power of the yoga was a very important element of this idealistic vision. Just as the Greek artist was enamoured by the perfectly proportioned human figure of an athlete, the Indian artist was captivated by the subtle and curvy flow of energy in the pulsating and vibrating body frame of—yogi—Human figures in Indian sculpture and painting are invariably touched by the flow of breath and life which make these figures discard grossness and heaviness of the mundane world.

The rock-cut caves of early medieval India were replicas of the royal palaces and mansions of the merchant princes. The contemporary Indian literature often describes these richly decorated houses of the rich. The descriptions reveal that the walls and ceilings of these houses were decorated with mural paintings and there used to be picture galleries—chitrashala—in these houses. Contemporary Indian literature refers not only to the bhitti-chitra and chitrashala but to scroll of paintings executed on textiles which were called Yamapattra and Charanchitra. These scrolls drew the happy and unhappy endings of human careers and cautioned the spectators about the law of karma. Cave paintings of early medieval Deccan drew heavily from these picture galleries and scrolls.

The earliest mural paintings in the Deccan were drawn on

the walls and ceilings of Ajanta caves that were excavated in the second century before Christ. The well-known poetical work of the Satavahana epoch, Gahasattasai describes the skill of a young bride who had artistically painted an image on the wall. All the literary works of the later period refer to the living tradition of mural paintings in the Deccan. Lilavai, a Maharashtra Prakrit epic draws a tender description of the art of wall painting in the following words. "The constant showers of pollen of flowers are blurring and fading the lustré of the points of the mural drawings on the wall of a house: The sweeping breeze causes a charming rain of pollen that fold the painted walls."

Gahasattasai, a Prakrit work composed in the early historic Deccan, makes fun of an ill-equipped young artist:

"Vanna Vakamana anasi
thanavidudhi vi denani
tvadia chitrabhara
tahavi maggasi moini
kudadammi alihind"

[He does not know how to prepare the ground for the painting. He does not know even the right sequence of the colours and wants to paint the picture—Gathasaptashati]

In Leelavai—a Maharashtra Prakrit work makes a sensitive description of a wall painting in a house:

"Ahanavara tattha doso
je viyasiya, kusuma
renu a padelena
mailijjati samirana
vasena ghara chitra
bhittio

The wall painting of the house get hazy and blurred on account of the constant shower of pollen of the flowers: Every time the breeze sweeps in it brings in a veritable rain of pollen that cover the painted walls."

[Leelavai, Ed. A.N. Upadhye]

A tenth century Jain literary work Yasastilaka of Somadeva Suri contains a separate section on mural paintings which describes two categories of wall paintings, the portraits of Jain mythological figures and the painted representation of the dreams seen by the mother of Tirthankar Rishabh-nath. Yasastilaka of Somadeva Suri also refers to the technique of Rupaganika—study of figure and Parshvagata—the side view profile.

Vividhananda, a ninth century play composed in the Deccan shows the hero of the play, who incidentally is a Rashtrakuta prince, and his lover depicting each other's portrait on the wall.

Manasollasa, a twelfth century literary work composed by the later Chalukya prince Someswara, contains a separate section on the technique of wall painting.

The thirteenth century Maharashtrian poet Dnyanesvara mentions in his work—Anubhavamruta—the forest scenes painted on the walls.

One of the most picturesque descriptions of the technique of wall painting is contained in the 14th century Marathi work Ukhahrana of Chobha.

The 17th century Marathi poet Krishnamuni in his work Rukmini-swayamvara gives a beautiful description of the erotic pictures painted on the walls of a Chitrashala.

The cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora have been referred to as fresco paintings. Latest trend in scholarly world tends to describe them as mural paintings and not frescoes. A real fresco is painting while the plaster is still damp but at Ellora like Ajanta murals were made after the plaster was set. The walls were first prepared by applying a coating of clay, cowdung and pulverised trap-rock, sometimes also with a rice-husk, to the rough excavated surface of the rock. The first layer was overlaid with a skin of lime-white gypsum. The technique of painting at Ellora like Ajanta, differed from Italian fresco. There is no diffusion of colours into the body of the plaster noticeable at Ajanta and Ellora. Pigments of colour are neatly superimposed on the surface as a thin but distinct layer without permeating into the body of the plaster. The organic binding medium, such as gum and glue that held the colours firmly to the ground.

The technique of Ellora painting like Ajanta is that of fresco-secco, the actual painting was done on a dry surface. A paste consisting of powdered rock, clay or cowdung mixed with chaff and molasses was smeared on the wall as ground. This was carefully smoothed out and whilst still wet was laid over with a coat of fine lime wash. Colour was applied when the ground had dried, and the final work was burnished. The colours were from minerals and plants and still retain some of their original brilliance. Cages, temples, and houses were embellished with mural paintings this very way.

Most prominent colours that were in use in the cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora were red ochre (gerua), vivid red (kumkum or sindura) yellow ochre (haritala) lamp black (kajjala) chalk-white (visuddha) and green (harita).

FORERUNNERS OF ELLORA

Recent archaeological researches have amply restored the story of the origins and evolution of paintings in India. In caves and rock-shelters of Mirzapur Bhimabetka and Kapgallu, some remarkable earliest Indian painting of pre-historic times were found. More than hundred such sites of primitive drawing and painting have now been reported. Large rock-surfaces in these shelters were covered with scenes of primitive human actions. Human encounters with wild creatures have been energetically drawn in red, yellow, green, black and white colours. These simple yet forceful and dramatic drawings of palaeolithic men inaugurate the panorama of Indian art.

Rock drawings of Bhimabetka were followed by the neolithic and chalcolithic pottery and ceramics. These pot-makers not only designed shapely ceramics but drew pictographic signs and figures on a variety of objects. They were the forerunners of Ajanta and Ellora. These primitive paintings were by and large two-dimensional exercises on rock surfaces. With Ajanta paintings we enter the phase of three-dimensional pictorial composition. In Ajanta caves, plastically modelled moving figures sway on the rocky phantasm in the curves of their postures. Colourful pictorial tapestries wend their way horizontally and vertically on the walls and ceilings of Ajanta. Modelling in line and colour, and device of shading are used to bring out the tri-dimensionality of the figures.

The artists of Ajanta worked in the dim caves with the help of light reflected from outside by the metal mirrors. From second century B.C. to sixth century A.D. the Ajanta painters were recreating the panorama of Indian life on the walls and ceilings of the caves. Princes and merchants, nobles and warriors, rich and poor, women and children, have been

drawn in most humanistic tenderness in Ajanta. The men and women who mix up with gods and apsaras belong to various racial and regional types. These figures come forth from darkness to light in a fashion which Stella Kramrisch calls "direction of forthcoming" like the rock-cut sculptures. Emerging from the depth of live rock, these painted figures emerge out of a magic box that exhibits its shapely figures instantly.

Joyous naturalism of Sanchi sculptures, linear rhythm of Amraoti carvings and lyrical notes of poetry of Hala and Kalidasa seem to have entered the painted figures of Ajanta. Ajanta left a legacy that was taken over by art centres which are separated from Ajanta by long distances and time. Accents of Ajanta brush-work journeyed to all parts of India and the world. Surviving fragments of paintings from Tun Huang in China, Baniyan in Afghanistan, Tsparang in Tibet and murals from Bagh, Ellora, Badami, Lepakshi and other Indian art centres bear witness to Ajanta's influence. Ellora was to walk in the footsteps of Ajanta.

Ellora Murals

ELLORA was the creation of an age that is far distant from our own. Ellora was the creation of a slow moving world in which pilgrims walked long distances, carts and pack-animals carried goods over lazy and lonely roads. Peals of bells aringing are no more heard in the courtyards of the Ellora caves. No Buddhist bhikku, Brahmin priest or a Jain Muni is now found living in these caves. Ellora now gives us only lingering shadows of its earlier shapes. Yet these shadows hold our breath once we go near them. These shadows are the rock-cut dreams of Ellora. They come to life and astound and surprise us. Hidden inside the caves of Ellora are the paintings that still cling to the walls and ceilings. Lively figures and criss-cross designs are spread over the walls, ceilings, railings and entablature brackets of these caves. What remains of painting at Ellora is not even one thousandth part of what once existed. Exposure to sun, wind, rains and human brutalities have permanently destroyed the major part of mural art at Ellora. Over the years colours on the painted panels have faded, number of chromatic frames have been peeled off. Yet the surviving

fragments of Ellora paintings give us an idea of its one time wealth of mural painting. A number of caves at Ellora—Kailasa, Indra Sabha, Ganesh and Lankeshvara—have their ceilings and walls painted in panels. Dasavatar, Dhumar, Do Thal, Tin Thal and a few other caves were once profusely painted. Art of Ellora is a tray of creative variety. Variety of men belonging to different generations have worked on the rocky material of Ellora hill. Their tastes, their ethnic origins, their sectarian affiliations, and levels of their artistic talent were different. Hence an impressive variety marks the artistic creativity at Ellora. Sculptures and paintings of Ellora equally share this variety.

Situated as it is in the mid-point between North and South, Ellora has absorbed and imbibed various styles and accents from various regions of India. Professional craftsmen produced their art in response to the demands of their patrons who belonged to various creeds and faiths. Various elements of the art world—fine and decorative, folk and canonical—were often amalgamated and assimilated by these craftsmen while working for their patrons. Painted rhythms of Ellora drawings are related to the main trunk of Indian mural tradition. All art styles absorb the pre-existing patterns of expression and also come to terms with contemporary fellow competitors. Ellora paintings grew out of the soil of the many late antique schools of art and religion. It was natural therefore that the Ellora mural art was fed by the stock of preceding art treasures of Ajanta and Bagh.

Style is one of the most deceptive concepts in art criticism having various connotations. The most exact and all embracing element in the style, however, is indicated by the inner essence of things manifesting through visible and tangible forms. Ellora offers a confusing variety of movements and mannerisms and any attempt to comprehend the

exact shades and trends in these paintings meets with many difficulties, yet we can discern variety of styles—realistic, abstract, naturalistic, conventional and formalistic. This propensity for varying expressions discernible in Ellora is traceable to earlier mural tradition of Ajanta and Bagh.

Imaginative fantasies, objective abstractions or purposeful distortions, strange yet familiar notes in the lyrical and dramatic movements of the figures articulate this propensity at Ellora. Linear freedom, the bounding line and its infinite inflections and movements are prominently met at Ajanta as well as at Ellora.

Countless figures that spread over the walls and ceilings of Ellora caves astound the spectators with sheer splendour of colour energies. The graceful bends and curves provide a gliding movement to the figures up and down the surface. These living, breathing and moving painted figures often capture the similar rhythm of the relief carvings of the sculptures. A flowing musical line often put sap of life into these painted figures. In horizontal panels and vertical compositions the brushwork moves up and down in rhythmic waves. The golden brown cylindrical figures tilt their heads and bend their legs. Their intense faces and elegant hair styles are striking as the contours of their bodies. The rhythmic flow of these flying figures often express a monotonous element of decorative mannerism.

The heavy breasted, luscious young women with pouting mouths, mystic gaze and dreamy almond eyes are drawn with a delicate musical line. These narrow waisted, heavy-hipped apsaras are caught in swinging movements and they are shown carefully bearing the load of their ornaments. Tense, tightly drawn vibrant figures burst out of the walls and ceilings. Delicate gentle faced cylindrical women with

heavy breasts and elaborate coiffeurs are drawn in curvacious, sweeping rhythmic contours. Their bodies move in gay circling movements. Variety marks their shapes. Bursting with tense stiffness some of them are heavy featured, heavy limbed and coltishly stubborn. Many of them are sophisticated frugalities, bubbling and swinging with energy. Rich exuberence of these figures is painted in reds, yellows, browns, blacks, greens and whites.

Ellora paintings unfold the pages of the biographies of countless figures of ancient Indian myth and history. But above all they represent the biographies of young and energetic men and women who have put on a divine look. In the lovely painted universe of Ellora youthful figures claim a prominent place. In this world of gods and goddesses, saints and warriors, yaksas, gandharvas and apsaras, it is the youthful body that dominates. The gross physically living phantasmagoric figures embody the intellectually subtle and spiritually sustaining substance of Indian religious ethos. Despite the much publicised spiritualist motivation of Indian art, Indian divinities never lost touch with the voluptuous and sensuous ecstasy of human body. Constant delight in the firm and smooth flesh is a hallmark of the Indian divinity as delineated in Indian art. Ellora artists have followed the technique of brush drawing developed at Ajanta that stressed and sustained the expression power of the swift-moving outlines of various styles. The Ellora painters attain pose and balance by arresting the rapturous intensity and abandonment of dance movement. The Ellora artists in keeping with the traditional Indian stylistics, conceive and design the human figure from the angle of basic anatomical form and ignore the accessories of muscles and tendons that fold it. Shades and light effects through aerial perspective and colour combinations were exercised by the Ellora artists to achieve tridimensionality. Variety and dignity of Ellora

sculptures had cast a deep shadow over the Ellora paintings. The linear freedom, bounding lines and infinite inflections and movements of the Ellora drawings, their grace, clarity brilliance are as notable as their authors are anonymous. No one has left his monogram on the murals. Yet each fragment impresses on our mind a distinct signature.

Critics and historians have rightly attempted to identify the genetic affinity of Ellora's painted figures with those of Badami, Sittanavasal and other art centres of early medieval India. Quite a scintillating contributions have been made relating to this aspect of art historiography. The problem however needs to be attacked from one more angle. The conceptual affinity of Ellora's painted figures needs to be traced in the surrounding flying figures carved on the walls, brackets and doorframes of Ellora caves. Not that the painting of Ellora shunned ties with the painting and sculptures of Badami and Mahabalipuram. The possibility of their getting inspired by the flying and leaping carved figures of Ellora should also be envisaged and traced. When the Ellora paintings are closely seen, one gets the impression that the linear rhythms of these carved flying gandharvas and apsaras of Ellora have dropped into the palettes and brushes of the Ellora painters. This is a point that has escaped attention of many critics.

Ellora paintings sum up and reflect the aesthetic discoveries of the Indian artists of an epoch that is only partly known to us. We can safely assume that Ellora painters were conducting a dialogue with Buddha-Shiva-Tirthankar inspired ideas on the one hand and with the deep rooted traditions of the popular cultures of their times. How far these paintings evoked and enflamed the emotional and intellectual responses of the pilgrims of those bygone days is too difficult to guess. Most of the Ellora paintings were

meant to impart symbolic meaning to the pilgrim-devotees of their times. It is too much to expect of a modern visitor to Ellora to know the intricacies involved in those symbols. Yet the elements of universal appeal that are present in these paintings succeed in communicating a lot of sense to the modern visitor.

FROM AJANTA TO ELLORA

Ajanta and Ellora are the magic words of Indian art world. Ajanta and Ellora are for Indian art what rainbow is for the sky, what flowers are for the trees, what feathers are for the birds. Work at Ajanta began in the second century B.C. and it came to close in the sixth century A.D. Ellora begins where Ajanta ends. The artist who left Ajanta in search of patronage went to Elephanta and Badami and they came to Ellora as well. Artist who came to Ellora did not stop at Ajanta. Ellora artists began to process and recast the earlier models of Ajanta into new patterns. They knew very well what had been done at Ajanta. The lovely figures of Padmapani, amorous daughters of Mara, the flying figures with their languishing and bashful poses and such other bewitching figures of Ajanta have cast their spell on the Ellora artists.

Ajanta and Ellora together represent fifteen centuries of artistic and religious activities in the Deccan. Their roles are evenly balanced in time sequence. First half of this period is dominated by Ajanta. Second half bears the impress of Ellora. Ajanta and Ellora both acted as bridge between the north and the south during this period. With the beginning of the excavation of Ajanta, Deccan entered from pre-history to history. Excavation of the first cave at Ellora marks the beginning of early medieval history not only in

the Deccan but all over the Indian subcontinent. Despite diverse tempo of socio-economic interactions during these two periods, a common thread connects the Deccan history. Assimilation of Indo-Gangetic cultural pattern with South Indian identity remains the connecting functional link between Ajanta and Ellora.

Ajanta and Ellora share a common pool of antique traditions and they also pull in diverse directions. At Ajanta painted images are not conceived in terms of depth but they come forward, creating an illusion of leading into depth. At Ellora the mode of forthcoming is overshadowed by the conflagration of surface drawings. Ajanta murals are not painted in well defined frames. Rhythm of the Ajanta colours sways the entire surface of the wall making the scenes stir with life actions. At Ellora scenes are composed within well defined rectangular frames and borders. Within a limited space of the rectangular panel, all sorts of figures, men and women, clouds and animal fantasies are packed.

The technique of painting on the rock surfaces is the same at Ajanta and Ellora. A mixture of clay, cowdung, pulverised rock, rice husks was applied to the surfaces of the rock. The first layer was overlaid with a fine white polished plaster. The colour was deeply ingrained after burnishing the surface with a small trowel. The brushwork started with the drawing of outline on the white plaster. Layer of thin terra-verde monochrome was followed by black and brown shading. While the technique of ingraining colour on the rock surface was similar at Ajanta and Ellora, perspective of figures was drawn slightly differently. At Ajanta painted figures emerge on the diagonal direction of coming forward. At Ellora figures are not born out of the impact of the coming forth. They just stand up weightlessly on or in between the conglobalated cloud clusters. Ellora compositions

are measured out in rectangular panels with thick flat borders. Most of the painted figures of Ellora move in the sphere of clouds. This is a continuation of Ajanta tradition. Variegatedly coloured clouds surround the totality of the world of Ellora's multiform figures. Two types of clouds cover the Ellora figures. Strongly composed black and cusped clouds sometimes assemble in great strength. And at times clouds lightly move like cotton and woollen balls. At times both the types overlap. Wave like crests of multi-shape clouds hold the weight of bodies that soar, swing, walk and fly across the sky. These cloud-borne bodies don't need any support for their flights. Without any strenuous efforts these figures walk, soar and dance in the sky in midst of cusps and scrolls of clouds.

There are many factors which have led to the destruction of mural wealth of Ellora. Inclemencies of nature and human brutalities have a considerable share in the ruination of Ellora's art. Weak and faulty technique of painting the rock surfaces has also affected the strength of these drawings. Priming or brush layout is an important element responsible for the durability of a painting. Smooth brushwork executed with glassy undercoating strengthens a panel. But a poor brushwork composed of incompatible and poor compounded ingredients result in disastrous consequences. Bugles, air bubbles, swellings, cracks, peeling, dessication and so on destroy the paintings. In Ellora wherever the technique has been handled effectively and smoothly, results have been spectacular.

One's first inclination is to treat Ellora painting as inferior to Ajanta. The contrast between the two schools in the field of sensibility and technical accomplishment is obvious. Yet when looked more closely one finds that there are paintings in the Kailasa and Indra Sabha at Ellora which

not only retain all the achievements of Ajanta, but also grow beyond Ajanta. Such paintings are neither rare nor exceptional. There is a breed of such paintings at Ellora. Reputation of Ajanta will not suffer an inch if the worth of Ellora's painting is acknowledged. Prejudices against early medieval diction have however prevented this acknowledgement at the hands of many critics.

Despite Ellora's glowing colours and tones with all the nuances known to Ajanta, figures of Ajanta affiliations have been gradually disappearing from Ellora's repository. The sharp twist of the head and pointed angular bends of the arms, concave curves of the closed lips, peaked and projected nose, the long drawn wide eyes and such other new features provide a novelty of vision which spread like wild fire in the medieval art world of India. Such Ellora figures have cast a shadow over the medieval manuscript figures of Western India. Though Ellora does not give an instance of a fully grown medieval style of figure drawing, Ellora does inaugurate a tendency towards that style. The Ellora figures therefore look somewhat frolicky but no less dramatic than those of Ajanta.

It has been argued that Ajanta murals displayed a creative sense of modelling whereas Ellora artists have depended on outlining the figures. It is true Ellora artists were making more and more vigorous use of linear rhythm in drawing the figures, yet they have not discarded the use of colour shades and tones. Ellora artists have retained the memory of Ajanta modelling while they were treading a new path of linear expression. A fresh look at the Ellora panels will restore the reputation of Ellora artists who have generally been underrated in the contemporary writings.

From Ajanta to Ellora, Indian pictorial art has traversed a long path. Ajanta articulated the Buddhist ethos of the Hinayana-Mahayana phase. At Ellora Buddhism had entered the Tantric-Vajrayana phase. Brahmanical and Jain Ellora also deeply felt the impact of Sarahapa's doctrine of Sahajayana. Painted tapestry at Ellora is depiction of earthly or heavenly courts of feudal aristocracies. The Ellora artists have however drawn the scenes from the feudal palaces in Tantric colours.

RANGA MAHAL—KAILASA

All the caves of Ellora were once decorated with painted panels. The surviving fragments and panels from Kailasa, Lankeshvara, Ganesha, Indra Sabha and Jagannatha Sabha give us the glimpses of the wealth of Ellora paintings that was once as rich as Ajanta paintings.

Ellora caves are more exposed to sun, wind and monsoon rains, than are the caves of Ajanta. This has resulted in making the colours of Ellora dull and insipid. In addition to the natural destructive element, the heat of fires kindled for domestic as well as religious purposes and the blackening effect of smoke have adversely affected the colours of Ellora panels. But there are some panels which were comparatively in safer state of preservation, wherein colours have retained their liveliness.

Literally a "magic mountain" Kailasa is an 8th century miracle of sculptured architecture. This largest and greatest monolithic temple was excavated by Rashtrakuta prince Krishna. A gigantic temple was carved out of a hill making room for halls, entrance porches and gates, galleries, balconies, pillars, and a pyramidal tower. The entire rock-cut

shrine is studded with countless sculptures. The sheer physical feat of carving such an imposing temple from the living rock awes the spectators. This whole stupendous monument was once decorated with stucco and painting. The monument was rightly known as Ranga Mahal among the local people. From Rashtrakuta Krishna to Ahilyabai Holkar, princely patrons have added layers and coats of paintings in Kailasa.

As we approach the main shrine of Kailasa, a close look at the ceiling and architraves of the western entrance porch will reveal to us a galaxy of painted figures. A carved lotus of an enormous size occupies the centre of this panel. All around this lotus there were rectangular painted panels. Many of them have faded. The surviving layers of panels retain some of the miracles of Ellora paintings. On the architrave beams of the ceiling, there are equally remarkable paintings representing battle-scenes. There are three notable layers in the paintings of this porch. The first layer was obviously painted immediately after the excavation of the monument in the 8th century. The figures and diction of the paintings of this layer have close affinity with the art tradition of Ajanta. The third layer on the architraves was painted during the days of Yadava-Paramar encounter which can be assigned to the 13th century. The two legends—"Svasti Shri Paramararau" and "Svasti Shri Kannaradeva rau" on the painted figures of these architraves connect these panels with the Paramars of Malva and Yadavas of Deogiri. Kannaradeva of this legend is perhaps Krishna of the Yadava dynasty that ruled the Devagiri kingdom. Prithviraja Raso of Chandabardai states that a daughter of a Yadava king of Devagiri and a daughter of Paramar king of Malva were both married to Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi. An unknown episode of Yadva-Paramara encounter is dramatically portrayed on these architraves.

Besides these paintings in the western entrance porch, Kailasa has many interesting murals in the central hall and side porches. The deva-devangana procession, Vishnu riding on his mount garuda, battle scenes of Paramara-Yadava period, Bhujanga Trasit Shiva Nataraja and Rescue of Sita by Hanumana, are some of the most lively panels of Kailasa illustrated in this work. The surviving paintings of Kailasa are so small in number that it is unfair to pass a judgement on the artistic value of the entire school of Ellora paintings on the basis on these few panels. We can only make certain general observations. It can be safely said that the earliest paintings of Kailasa, notably the decoration in the spandrels around the carved lotus boss in the centre of the ceiling have close affinity with Ajanta. The deva-devanganas and the elephants playing in a big lotus bond are the direct descendants of Ajanta. This beautiful elephant amidst a lotus pattern is one of the loveliest painted figures of Kailasa.

The figure drawing of the earliest panel of Kailasa has a dignified individual style that keeps it apart from Ajanta. Sharp feature represented by beak like noses and wide eyes connects this panel with the later development of Jain miniature of Gujarat. The painted panels of Indra Sabha are as reminiscent of Ajanta paintings as of Kailasa fragments. The tumultuous fervour of war expressed by the groups of warriors, horses and elephants have rendered a vigour to Kailasa style. The horses here have been shown more spirited than those of Ajanta. The figures of warriors bring these paintings closer to Rajput style of the later period.

The Ganesa lene paintings relate to the Puranic legends and characters such as the churning of the ocean by gods, figure of Brahma, Shiva and other Brahmanical icons. The style of Ganesa Lene paintings is a bit crude. In a way these painted figures of Ganesa Lene are more a part of Brah-

manical iconography than that of plastic representation.

INDRA SABHA

Among the five Jain shrines at Ellora, the most impressive paintings are still visible in Indra Sabha and Jagannath. Sabha which are the interesting examples of rock-cut architecture of 9th and 10th century.

Angular draughtsmanship of these painted panels presents effective and convincing outlines of human body. The workmanship of Jain painters of Ellora also gave some thought to idea of modelling by making use of deep ochre colour wash and by keeping the trace of contour line. The painted flying figures of Indra Sabha have plastic affinity with the painted figures of Ajanta and with the sculptured representations of similar figures at Ellora itself.

Jain excavations at Ellora represent the last phase of rock-cut activity at Ellora. Chhota Kailasa, Indra Sabha and Jagannatha Sabha are the notable Jain shrines at Ellora. In Indra Sabha and Jagannatha Sabha a number of paintings are visible on the ceiling and walls. It is in Indra Sabha that we can see the maximum number of paintings at Ellora. There are hundreds of painted figures in the rectangular panels of Indra Sabha.

When we enter the upper storey of the Indira Sabha, a magic pavilion opens before our eyes. A pavilion of pictorial fluidity, teeming with life and form, swaying with the variegatedly coloured rhythm, opens before us. A slow movement of voluminous bodies of clouds shadows the weightless figures that bubble with life in each of painted frames. Like the painted panels of Kailasanatha and Ganesha Lene, the Indra Sabha murals are replete with clouds. Figures are shown

emerging from the clouds. They soar in front of the clouds. They fly, float and spread across the clouds. Freely moving they float and emerge in the cloudy atmosphere. Wave like crests of trefoil clouds surround these shapely figures. Indra Sabha is full of painted lovely female figures. Some of the damsels urged by passion fondle their lovers with their full firm bosoms, another woman stumbles, others are holding flowers. These damsels along with their partners, half-asleep and half-awake have left the woods and streams, fields and hills. They are now cloud-borne and as long as the rocks of Ellora would hold them firm they will continue to swing and float.

One of the striking features of these Jain paintings at Ellora is that while male dominance is formally acknowledged, female figures are shown free and assertive.

Every perception and feeling, every doubt and belief and all unanswered questions are reflected in the faces of these divine women. If we have patience they would speak to us and open their thoughts. They will speak to us about everything but they would not utter a word about the male dominance. While they seem to take great pleasure in their rich dress and make up they do it for their own joy and not for the lords. They are putting up those proud clothes not as weapons for the conquest of their cohorts. They are adoring themselves as equal partners, often the women are shown sharing one cohort among two or even three.

In a male-dominated feudal society, wherein women had to suffer a disabled and secondary position, the lot of Indian women along with the shudra slaves was proverbially pathetic. The painted women of Jain Ellora have anything but a manifestation of low servitude. The pride that they have swings in every curve of these flying women. The Tantrik artists who gave them life also gave them pride.

Album of Ellora Paintings

SHIVA NATARAJA

Cover Page Plate I—This Nataraja Shiva panel from the central hall of Kailasa is one of the celebrated paintings of Ellora. Whether this figure is Chalukya or Nataraja or Rashtrakuta Nataraja is a point that will be debated endlessly by the scholars. Regional and dynastical schools of patriotic scholarship have, however, raised some interesting points relating to this panel. The feminine elements of this Shiva figure have baffled many critics. The artist who drew this figure had certainly the concept of Ardhanarineshvara at the back of his mind. Besides the soft and tenderly expression on Shiva's face, colourful choli that he is wearing makes him look almost like Parvati. The trisula, damaru, khata-wang however remind us of awe-inspiring Rudra.

Karpura gaura-camphor white Shiva is glowing with creamy shimmer while playing his cosmic dance. Composition of Shiva Tandava faces many problems the chief of which relates to delineation of a multi-arm dancing figure.

The Ellora sculptors who were among the first to carve the dancing Shiva with great dexterity solved this problem by regarding the relief field as an arena the centre and circumference of which are indissolubly connected. The movements thrown out by the centre are collected by the circumference and reversed towards the centre. Vertical and horizontal lines, angles, and curves are collected and reversed in this circle. This compositional logic of Ellora sculptor was fully understood and used by the painter of this Shiva Tandava in the Bhujanga-trasit mudra. The head, torso, arms and legs of Shiva are energetically thrown out and recollected along the vertical line of gravity that passes from Shiva's head and enters into his foot. The tempo of Shiva's dance is gradually speeded up. Shiva's rotating body, its assembled and pulled up character has been shown in a dynamic texture of stresses and movements. The entire body of eight-arm Shiva is caught in whirlwind movement around the vertical axis on his left leg. Triple curves of the entire body are firmly held by the left leg. Slightly tilted head, and whirling arms keep rhythm with the rotary mobility of the bulky hip and triply bent curve of the right leg. The overhanging jata-mukuta crown, armlets, anklets, trinklets, bracelets, necklace and fluttering ribbons of the lower garment make this panel scintillating decorative piece. Shiva's pose has rightly been described as Bhujang-trasit, i.e., harassed by the serpent pose. The figure of Shiva, however, is absolutely self-composed and undisturbed. The movements of Shiva's entire body create a circle of rotating lines, some of which are concurrent and convergent and some of them are opposite and divergent.

One of Shiva's arms is thrown back so acutely that it gives the impression that Shiva has five arms on right side and three on left side. Approximate date 9th century.

Dream flowers of Ellora

Plate 2: This is the earliest painted panel from the ceiling of the western porch of Kailasa. This is one single panel at Ellora which retains all the attainments of Ajanta and yet grows beyond them. Flying across the clouds and lifting themselves in the sky, these heavenly creatures are leading a procession to the Shiva's great abode on Kailasa. They are descending on the beautiful peak and fruitful valley of Himalayas. The clouds and figures of this panel are bubbling with life. The youthful devas, devanganas, gandharvas and apsaras are alive with grace. Their eloquent visual forms are drawn in musical lines. They are dream flowers whose exuberant and fair faces glow like wine-red buds!

The vyala riding Devapurusha of this panel has affinity with Ajanta's celebrated Padmapani figure. The Ellora devapurusha and his followers have been drawn very admirably by the Ellora artists. The figure of the vyala-riding god is suffused by a gentle inward life. He is shown holding his hands in adoration to Shiva. We are impressed by his own expression of compassion for his fellow beings. This angelic figure is riding a fantastically composed fabulous animal with the beak of an eagle, or a parrot, the horns of a ram and the body of a lion. The gentleness of this angelic figure who occupies a dominant position in this panel is counterfoiled by the arrogance of the fabulous creature. This fantastic cocky is mocking at every other creature of the universe. The vainglory of this fantastic creature is perhaps meant to provide an ironical interlude that would relieve the serious and serene tones of the charming and shapely figures of this composition. The Bodhisatva like angel of Ellora who is riding the fabulous creature, pervades a spirit of tenderness and compassion all around him. All other lovely creatures surrounding this Devapurusha percolate a loving rhythm in

the entire composition. Crowd of these heavenly figures stand more in reference to the context of Shiva adoration than to one another. One couple in this panel is caught in a ludicrous posture. The crown wearing male figure of this pair has twisted his legs in some Tantric pose. A pair of dwarfs has been shown in a funny pose. They are holding each other in close embrace and pressing their noses together.

The linear draughtsmanship has attempted a bold and sweeping definition of the contours of the body in this panel. Linear rhythm has overtaken the sense of colour modelling. Pointed sharpness of the figures and the extension of the farther eye mark the new accent and diction of Ellora painting. This feature was to travel like a wild-fire in the medieval painting.

The decorative fragment in the spandrel around the curved lotus boss in the centre of the ceiling corners of this panel. A lovely scene of elephants sporting in a gigantic lotus pond reminds us of Ajanta elephants.

Approximate date 8th century.

Aspects of Shiva

Plate 3: This multi-colour panel from the western porch of Kailasa pins down the main theme of Brahmanical Ellora. Mahayogi Shiva and the eternal wanderer Shiva have been very colourfully drawn in this panel. The cross-legged Mahayogi Shiva is sitting on a throne with all the marks of medieval royalty. Gods were always made in human image. In medieval iconography overlordship of a god is invariably shown as a counterpart of the worldly overlordship summed up in the figure of a medieval king. From amongst the

medieval images, it is difficult to separate figure of a god from that of a king. It is the iconography that sifts gods from kings. The Mahayogi Shiva of this panel looks a king every inch but the yogic posture is overruling all other aspects of Shiva's manifestations in this panel. Shiva on the bull back is driving fast across the firmament under the same sort of umbrella. His crown, necklace, earrings, bracelets are part of the royal iconography. It is the Nandi that gives him an aspect of Shiva's manifestation. But for this Nandi this well decorated figure would have passed for a medieval king. In the other corner of the panel a princely figure is approaching from a distance. This is a retention of Ajanta's "coming forth" style. This figure could be a Shiva or a princely devotee. He has not discarded his royal marks. Crown, earrings and a necklace decorate his body. But his ornaments are not as conspicuous as the sculpturesque plastic roundness of this figure. In between these three prominent figures, there are at least five recognisable figures who are supporting the main theme of the panel. The two female figures, one near the Nandi riding Shiva and the other near the Mahayogi Shiva are obviously Shiva's shaktis. The third female figure in the top corner is an apsara. The shadow-bound figure is a Tantrik enigma. The other figure with raised hands also suggests the phenomenon of Tantric trance. Ellora was a centre of Tantric siddhas. Local tradition at Khultabad-Ellora connects many sites in its vicinity with Nathapanthi siddhas. Tantrism means not only orgiastic rites involving five makaras—matsya (fish) mamsa (meat) madya (intoxicating drink) maithuna (sex) and mudra (physical gestures)—but also cult of the mothergoddess that initiated men and women of all castes into a fraternal bond. Tantrism was not confined to shakta system alone but it also penetrated into Shaiva, Vaishnava, Buddhist and Jain systems. Artists and artisans of early medieval India were deeply attached to Tantrasadhana which united mukti

(liberation) and *bhukti* (enjoyment) in the *kamayani* (fulfilment of desire) ritual. Ellora sculptures and paintings are deeply infused with Tantric spirit. This panel breathes the same spirit. Apart from the Tantric undertone, there is another remarkable feature that distinguishes this panel. The clouds in the panel have melted into a glowing flow of ripples in the firmament. In midst of this strange liquid flow the Shiva manifestations are glowing with flameshine.

Approximate date 8th-9th century.

GARUDAVAHANA VISHNU

Plate 4: This panel from the western porch of Kailasa represents the second layer of paintings at Kailasa. Vishnu, Lakshmi and *Bhudevi* are taking an eagle ride in the sky. Garuda, the chief of the eagles is looking very submissive and carrying the god on his shoulders very courteously. The female eagle carrying Lakshmi on her shoulders, is looking mightily proud. The female eagle carrying *Bhudevi* on her shoulders is perhaps pondering over the vanity of all assignments. Lakshmi is taking her ride easily. *Bhudevi* is feeling slightly awkward. The *apsaras* in the vicinity are deeply involved in their sky-dance. All these thin and wiry figures are floating through clouds with buoyancy and lightness. Male eagle is shown to have human face and legs. The female eagles have human faces and legs of a goat. A royal umbrella over Vishnu's head less indicates Vishnu's heavenly supremacy but it emphasises more the larger supremacy of Shiva whom mightiest of overlords offer their submission. Vishnu's visit to Kailasa as painted in this panel must have gladdened the hearts of the Shaivite devotees.

This panel on the one hand retains some accents of Ajanta diction, on the other it makes a departure from it by introducing quick, sharp, jerky lines in the drawing. Sharp features and three quarter profile which distinguishes the late medieval painting, make their appearance for the first time at Ellora. Linear treatment of the figure is stressed in the new trend. Sharp angular inflections and shallow curves characterise the emerging tranquil linear treatment of the body.

Approximate date 9th century.

Charge of A Brigade

Plate 5: This panel painted on the north beam of the western porch of Kailasa represents a remarkable war scene of early medieval India. Most of the warriors in this scene are painted in blood red colour. The charge of the brigade is led by a tall and well built swordsman. His chest, shoulders, eyes and arms are emitting fire and fever. He is perhaps shown returning to his chief for reporting a victory in the battle. His hair crop is bound in a ribbon band. A garland is swaying on his chest. The diagonal thrust of his sword across the backline of the buffalow which he is riding is either a submission to Shiva or to his own warlord whether he is giving an account of his war handicraft to the Lord Shiva or to the Chakravarti Chhatrapati, did not make any difference to the Shiva's devotees. Submission of a mighty to the mightiest of the Lords impressed the devotees.

Groups of infantry and cavalry followed the warrior chief. The spirited horses have been painted in light yellow and brownish shades. The large earrings, the tightly tied hair tops and large shields are among the notable features of

the panel. Figures display distinct individual traits colour shading and colour outlines have rendered element of modelling to the three quarter profiles of the figures. This has led to a partial tri-dimensional perspective panel which provides a real panoramic view of the home returning warrior bands. Whether these warriors belonged to the Yadava fold or Paramara fold, whether they have gathered at Ellora for attending a marriage function or for witnessing the ceremony of signing a treaty, are such questions which can be easily raised but not answered.

Approximate date 12th-13th century.

MEDIEVAL ENCOUNTER

Plate 6: Here is another dramatic piece of medieval war-craft, from the same porch. Not the large elephantine bulk but the furies let loose among human elements make this panel a masterpiece of early medieval painting. Elephant figures of this [painting] are much damaged, but the tinkling bells that are freely hanging on the backside of the elephant in the left corner speak of the swiftly pressed energies in this battle. The upshot of the battle is yet hanging in balance. The artist who painted this scene, however, knew the fate of the contest. The warrior on the horse back who had made a dashing and dramatic entry in the fray, is shown suddenly thrown back while he was trying to charge his spear. He is shown in a very disadvantageous position. The warrior chief riding the elephant has all the advantages. Firstly he has the advantage of height. The elephant that carries the warrior chief has already taken a firm position. His hind legs are lowered on the ground, and with his huge trunk he is attacking the cavalry hero whose horse has already sensed the formidable thrust of the elephant and has turned his head

defensively. The warrior chief driving the elephant is seen taking full advantage of the moment. He has stuck a decisive blow that will hit the cavalry hero. The footmen behind the elephant are moving their weapons in the air.

Over the head of the elephant that carries warrior chief there is a legend inscribed in Devanagari of 12th or 13th century which reads: Svasti Shri Paramara rau. Paramara Yadava connection has already been discussed. Whether the encounter painted in this panel relates to a feud between Yadavas and Paramaras or it shows an armed tie between Paramara army and a band of Muslim warriors is a question that has baffled many historians. The problem is further complicated by the finding of an inscribed legend in this very porch which reads: Mahamasu Loka. If Mahamasu means musulman then Turkish involvement in the war-scenes of this architrave is clearly implied. That Paramaras of Malva and Yadavas of Devagiri were involved in skirmishes with the newly arrived Turkish intruders in medieval Indian politics is reported by many epigraphic and literary records. These records, however, are tightlipped about the Ellora's painted battle scenes.

Approximate date 12th-13th century.

ARMS AND THE MEN

Plate 7: Here is another group of warriors from the same porch. The leader of this group is a princely chief who is commanding a very spirited platoon of cavalry and infantry. A heavily built massive figure of this princely chief has a royal umbrella over his head and a royal insignia follows him. He has put on a helmet. Except a lower garment he has no other clothes on his body. The long spread eyebrows and

moustaches make him look severe. He appears to be a man of great business. He is riding a horse without any stirrup. From amongst the three other warriors on the horseback only one figure is intact. Other two are peeled off. The one that can be seen has an oval face. Like other figures his large crop of hair is tied by a ribbon band. A group of six infantry men is seen following the warrior chief. One who is holding the flag is a damaged figure. His head is peeled off. The rest of the group is moving with great speed. They are holding large shields in their left hands and with their right hands they are flourishing sharp edged swords. They belong to that medieval brigade of Indian soldiery whose charge was not to question why but to do and die. They are not Shiva's devotees. They are here in Kailasa because their chief is visiting the Mahadeva. Their only mark of chivalry was devotion to their war lord. The first swordsman among these mercenaries has sharp features and his smart turn out is impressive. The rest have their own individual striking features. The horses have been drawn very admirably. The swiftness of their gallop is notable.

Approximate date 12th-13th century.

MEN ON THE HORSEBACK

Plate 8: Here is another panel from the same porch which shows a charge of the cavalry group. Leader of the group is commanding his five subordinates to stop the charge. His order to halt was quite unexpected but all his subordinates and the horses have instantly obeyed his command. The leader is raising his hand and tightening his lips to further control the charge. He looks an elderly capable person. He has put on an armour on his chest. All his subordinates are looking to him while carrying his command. These cavalry-

men have well trimmed beards and large crop of hair tied by ribbon band. They have put on large earrings. Their facial expressions are strikingly distinct. The immediately next to the chief is slightly dismayed. The next one has eagerly caught the captain's word. The third one is outwardly indifferent but minds his business meticulously. The fourth one does not betray his feelings. He obeys the order mechanically. The face of the last soldier is damaged. Horses are tip toe. Their heads are tied by knotted belts. A chain hangs around the neck of the front horse. Whether these soldiers are carrying their weapons is not visible. What assignment was commissioned to them is also not clear. Every inch they look smart; that is certain.

Approximate date 12th-13th century.

ALL OUT ATTACK

Plate 9: Here is another piece of war glory from the door jamb of the central hall of Kailasa which approaches southern porch. The panel is painted in yellow, brown and red. Upper part of the panel shows a warrior driving an elephant. The elephant is fully involved in the human battle. The elephant has already picked up a helpless soldier from the enemy camp in his long winding trunk and making an obviously successful bid to hurl him into the firmament. Another head is already rolling before the front leg of the elephant.

In the lower part of the panel spirited warriors on the horseback are flourishing their unsheathed sharp swords. A long moustached warrior in the bottom is throwing his spear with all the force at his command. There seems to be a crown prince amongst the men on the horseback. His crown is as conspicuous as his sword. The gallop of the spirited

horses has been ably drawn. All the figures in the panel have sharp features. Their tightly tied hair crops are also notable.

Approximate date 12th-13th century.

HANUMAN RESCUING SITA

Plate 10: This is a crude yet striking panel from the south porch of Kailasa. Fantasy and fancy could not grow beyond the linear rhythm of this drawing in the early medieval period. This painting is a late addition to the ceiling of the south porch of Kailasa. This panel must have been painted at a time when the Ramayana and Mahabharata panels were carved on the plinth of the Kailasa. The panel deals with an episode from Ramayana. It narrates a dramatic scene of Sita's rescue from Ravana's custody by Hanumana. The Raksasi custodians of Sita in the Asokavana have been rendered more attractive than Sita in this panel. Hanuman, who is carrying Sita on his shoulders, is taking a long and quick stride. Clouds are gathered all over the garden. The clouds have perhaps helped Hanumana to undertake this hazard. Hanumana is carrying Sita on his shoulders while the female Raksasi attendants are either ignoring the incident or they have not noticed a whit of it. Sita's confinement in the Ashokavana has adversely affected her body and mind. She is looking almost wrecked. Even now when Hanumana is rescuing her, she is not sure that her difficulties were over. She is, nevertheless, grateful to Hanuman for his venture. She is thanking him with her folded hands.

Approximate date 12th century.

SAMUDRA-MANTHANA

Plate 11: This panel from Ganesh Lena renders a colourful account of a Puranic legend known as Samudramanthana. In the Deva-Danava conflict, Devas were losing. Vishnu advised the Devas to negotiate a truce with the Danavas and induce the Danavas to participate with Devas in the great venture of churning the ocean for acquiring the ambrosia—amrita. Vishnu further assured the Devas that he would see to it that Danavas never have the ambrosia for themselves. The Devas acted on Vishnu's advice. They induced Bali, the king of the Danavas, to agree to a truce. Gods and genii then together churned the ocean, using the great serpent Vasuki as rope and Mandara, the mountain, as a churning rod. The panel shows the Gods and genii twining and twirling the divine snake Vasuki around the mountain and churning the ocean in the manner in which Indian housemaids churn butter. The Gods are holding the tail part of Vasuki's body and the Danavas are holding his head part. From the churned ocean emerged the ambrosia and various other treasures. Vishnu, assuming the form of Mohini—the divine enchantress—duped the Danavas and denied them the gain of ambrosia. The Devas were thus saved to have the sole possession of ambrosia and become eternally youthful. The story is a late creation of Mahabharata and Puranas. It is connected with kurma avatar—tortoise incarnation of Vishnu. Vishnu had assumed the form of a tortoise and dived to the bottom of the ocean. On his back the mount Mandar was set for the churning of ocean.

Approximate date 11th century.

TRIMURTI

Plate 12: This trimukha panel is also from Ganesh cave. The iconography of this figure is not clear. He could be a three-headed Mahadeva Shiva. Figure has been identified also as Brahma as well as the composite image of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha. The safe guess will be a trimukha Shiva. In the hook-shaped complex of small caves known as Ganesh lene the image of trimukha Shiva is carved on the backwall of many shrines. It may be noted that triple-headed Shiva image had acquired wider appeal during the phase of the excavation of Ganesh lene. A stone trimukha image that has been identified as Sarveshvara was collected from among the loose sculptures found in Khultabad, a medieval Muslim township which was the site of an earlier large settlement that can be identified with Elapur of the Sanskrit inscriptions. There is quite an affinity between the Khultabad trimurti and the one from this panel. The figure is standing on a lotus pedestal and is surmounted by a flying divinity.

Approximate date 11th century.

INDRASABHA TIRTHANKARA

Plate 13: This is the painted image of Parsvanatha from the side chamber of Indra Sabha. The Jains were the last to cut sanctuaries in the rocks of Ellora. Indra Sabha is one of the most delicately decorated caves of Ellora. The Tirthankara image of this panel is typical of the Jain art. It is only in Jain art that absolutely unclothed figures are found. The nudity of the Tirthankara represents a condition of absolute detachment from the world. The Jain gospel of release from bondage of life and rebirth insisted on renunciation. The painted image of Tirthankara Parsvanatha from Indra Sabha belongs

to that tradition. Parsvanatha is perhaps one of the most popular of the Jain Tirthankaras. This painted image of Parsvanatha reiterates the elements of Jain iconography. Parsvanatha is standing in the kayotsarga mudra. A canopy of seven snakes with its waving lines and curves hovers round the head of Tirthankara. Parsvanatha is distinguished from Suparsvanatha by the fact of his having seven hoods for the serpent that hovers round him. Suparsvanatha's snake had five hoods. Parsvanatha was the twentythird Tirthankara and is one of the oft repeated figures in sculpture and painting of Jain Ellora. This enlightened yogic Tirthankara is painted in gold, brownish and violet colours in the Indra Sabha side chamber.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

TWO COUPLES

Plate 14: This panel from the Indra Sabha decorates the eastern corner of its ceiling. Among the two couples one on our left side is an elderly one. The male partner looks insipid, the female is aggressive. This apsara is winking at some one. Her wink executes a snubbing and not a secret signal. The sophisticated frugality of this high strung and enticing apsara seems to have suffered some offence at the hands of someone who is not there in the picture. The couples on our right side look more interested in their own company. The conic cap wearer has picked up a lotus from a bowl held by the winking apsara. He is proposing something to his consort with this lifted lotus. The panel is replete with clouds. These globular and vaporous clouds are restless and wanting to burst. Cool rush of the clouds has refreshed the two couples in their sky journey.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

DRUMMER IN THE SKY

Plate 15: This drummer from the Indra Sabha reminds us of the sculptured figures of flying gandharvas on the walls and tower of Kailasa shrine of Ellora. This painted drummer comes close to the relief carvings of such figures in Ellora. This divine drummer draws clouds and women around him. All of them sway and surge. Only the drum remains firm and steady. The heavily built drummer places his legs and flexes his knees around the drum with an amazing lightness. In this lovely panel colour lines have given a tridimensionality to the figures. Red, gerua, green, yellow, brown and black pigments have given brightness to these lovely figures. All the figures are seen lost in the drum beats. The drummer is playing the drum so skilfully that three apsaras around him are greatly impressed. The brush work is free yet firm. It gives sinuous and rounded flexibility to the figures.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

FLYING WITH THE CLOUDS

Plate 16: This twin panel from the side chamber of Indra Sabha shows slenderly cut figures with bending limbs taking an unearthly tread across the sky. They are shown soaring and dancing amidst conglobulations of clouds. In the panel on our left side the figure in the centre is wearing his cone-shaped stripy cap easily while dancing in the sky. An apsara facing him is responding him. The gandharva has been drawn with great sensitivity. The two apsaras have some stiffness about them. The jumping position of Gandharva's legs indicates a travel along a trajectory. Wind in his heart and fire in his heels, Gandharva is moving in full swing.

In the panel on our right side, a young Gandharva is being held by an apsara. Gandharva is wearing a scintillating and sparking stripy conic cap. Young celestial looks more shy than the woman holding him. She looks more sure about herself and about the destination of their flight. The woman moving separately looks exhausted and neglected. With a heavy heart she is pining after what is not. But she is pretty youthful. Her youth in every curve, her feline sadness in her tortuous rapture, this sky walker is the spirit of balle dance. Her body, face, breasts, belly and rump all move with a triple supple. Moving through the clouds, all the figures in this twin-panel carry dance in their hands, flight in their legs and passions on their faces.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

CROSSING THE SKY

Plate 17: These flying figures from Indra Sabha are heavy featured. The woman is coltishly tight-lipped. The long moustached attendant is ferociously dull; yet the gliding movement of the central figure had infused dynamism to the panel. The heavy featured tight-lipped apsara is not putting any efforts for crossing the sky. Neither the long moustached dull nincompoom is active. Clouds are just lifting them. The clouds in this panel look like embossment of clusters of dots enveloping the entire panel. Brown, red, yellow, black and creamy white colours have been used to draw the panel

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

SKY LIFT

Plate 18: This panel from Indra Sabha narrates an interesting aspect of a flight of the celestials through the sky. An apsara has the misfortune or perhaps a fortune to be carried by a Gandharva in his lap. Another apsara, flying singly by the side of the pair, is looking indifferently. The waves of their triply bent shapes rise, fall and rest on their bodies and pass through the clouds that are scattered like heaps of soft cotton. An undercurrent of melancholy, langour and exhaustion are quite evident on the faces of the couple. The brushwork mounts upward and falls downward in rhythmic waves. Red, green, black, brown and white pigments have been used by the artists to bring out a melody of colours.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

WAVELETS IN THE SKY

Plate 19: Here is a twin panel from the Indra Sabha side chamber. In the panel on our left side a young couple is seen flying. A gana is leading their path; another figure is following them. The gana is holding a torch light. The young couple looks hesitant and confused. They are not sure of their course. In the next panel a demigod is flanked by two vivacious women. This demigod has found his way to the Tirthankara. He has folded his hands to pay adoration to the Tirthankara. Damsel with drooping breasts looks childishly inquisitive, the other lady looks serious and composed. A surging tide of clouds envelops the flying figures in both panels. These weightlessly poised slim figures, with their long and slender legs, float and emerge through clouds. Their shoulders and chests are holding the gravitational pools. Their bodies and limbs are swinging and swimming across the sky. In the

panel on the left, light, pink, brown and light green colours are used. In the next panel, crimson red, yellow, white and brown colours are used. A strip of geometrical design separates the two panels.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

VANISHING BEAUTY

Plate 20: This Indra Sabha figure has a distinct dignity. This tall slender with its shorty loin cloth, loosened and slipping down is firmly holding a musical instrument. This feminine beauty has something of a masculine audacity and divine tenderness about her. She has proud looks. Steeped in the awareness of her young, full and stiff body, this celestial damsel looks straight and probes the mysteries of unheard melody. This slowly vanishing figure of Indra Sabha has been drawn by my artist friend on the basis of an earlier reported reproduction.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

EXUBERANCE OF COLOUR

Plate 21: Exuberance of colour has given energetic tones to this panel from Jagannatha Sabha. Otherwise the couple in this panel is cut in very humble tones. Ellora artists have not painted such simple folk in any other panel. They are common folk fallen in the divine company. Such a simplistic joy in exuberance of colour could not be cited in any other painted panel at Ellora. The heavily gathered clouds in this panel look like colourful balloons; brown, red, yellow, green and light blue colours dominate this composition. The

globular conglomerations are seething with tongues of fire and foam.

Approximate date 9th-10th century.

YAMARAJA OF ELLORA

Plate 22: This is a fragment from the ceiling of Jagannatha Sabha. This is one of the earliest figures of Yama in Indian painting. In the Sanskrit literature we come across a word Yamapatta. Yamapatta was a painted panel wherein Yama, the god of death, king of infernal regions was shown giving stern judgement to all sinners. Yamapattas of Sanskrit literature were executed on textile scrolls. This panel on the ceiling of Jagannatha Sabha has a close affinity with Yamapatta. In this panel Yama is shown riding a buffalow and holding a noose. Yama's wife Dhumorni is sitting close to Yama on the back of buffalow. Two women are acting as his harbingers. One is holding his sceptre. A deformed goblin is following Yama's ride. In the top corner an apsara is seen offering tribute to Yama. A Yogi in the right hand corner and a devotee in the bottom centre are seen undisturbed. A woman in the right hand corner looks very much concerned and frightened. A human shadow is hovering over the entire panel. Flowing and mellowed linear rhythm of this panel makes it a remarkable mural of Ellora.

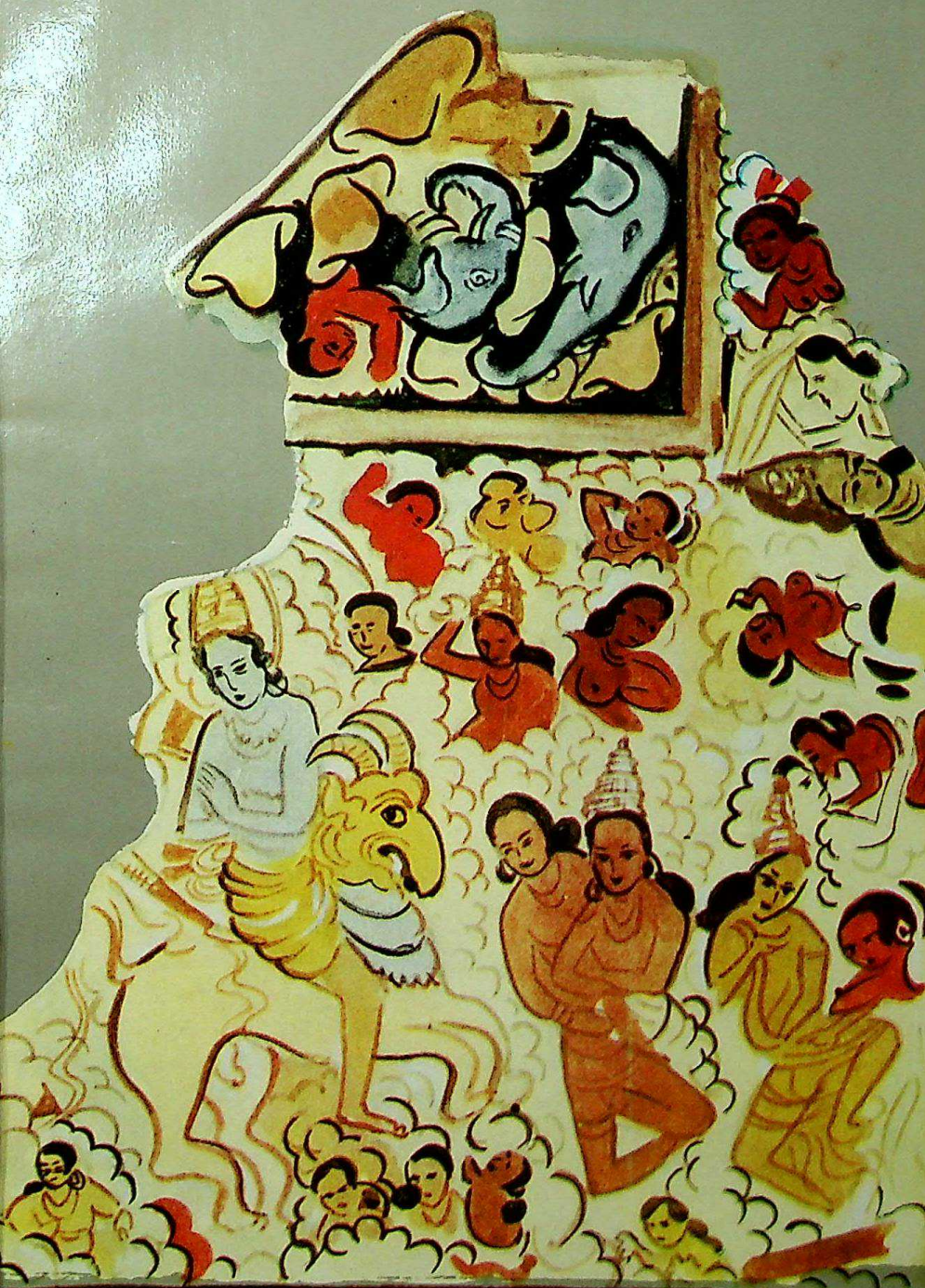
Approximate date 9th-10th century.

Post-script

AN interesting folk tale circulates among the villagers in the vicinity of Ajanta and Ellora. The genesis of the sculptures of Ajanta and Ellora has received a charming version in this folk tale. The story goes that long long ago devas, devanganas, gandharvas and apsaras resolved to spend a full moon night on the earth. Indra allowed them to leave the paradise on the condition that they would return to heaven from earth before the next sunrise. Davas and devanganas along with the apsaras and gandharvas came to the earth. While descending from heaven they spotted the moonlit hills of Ajanta and Ellora. Some of the celestials went to Ajanta and some of them came to Ellora. The gods and nymphs danced, sang and played in the valleys of Ajanta and Ellora. They liked the spot so much that they forgot Indra's instruction to return home before sunrise. When the day broke they were still found playing on the cliffs and flanks of the hills of Ajanta and Ellora. This divine folly resulted in the transformation of these celestial creatures into stone images because of Indra's curse. The author of this folk-tale forgot to add that many of these celestial creatures were transplanted into the lovely paintings of Ajanta and Ellora. This post-script proposes to restore that forgotten part of the folk-tale.

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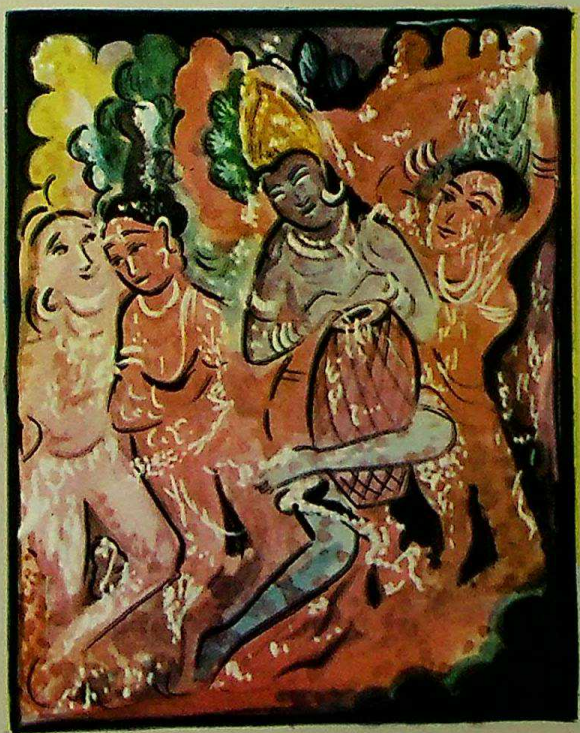






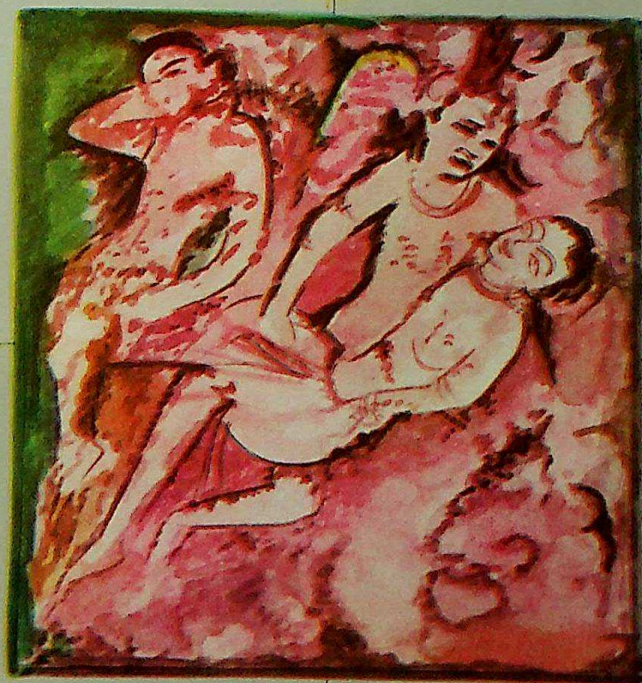








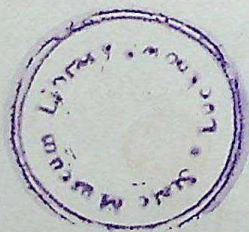














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